

Should Christians Have Hobbies?

By Dave DeWitt

Thesis: Many Christian web sites ask the above question, but never actually answer it. The usual answer is something like, "It's okay to have hobbies if they aren't sinful." For example, gotquestions.org concludes this.

So yes, Christians can have hobbies, but we have to make sure they never replace Christ. That is the temptation, and we must be sure to avoid it.

That's true. I would add if they don't obstruct biblically mandated priorities. But all that does not answer the question. Most Christian sites answer the question, "May," or "Can", or "Is it okay," for Christians to have hobbies. But the question gotquestions.org asks, and does not answer, is "**Should** Christians have hobbies?" To conclude that hobbies are okay if they are not bad, does not answer the question. So, I want to attempt an answer. I suggest that if it is at all possible,

Yes, a Christian should have a hobby.

It can be argued that hobbies did not exist for most people, before the Industrial Revolution. A few rich people could go on a fox hunt or play polo I suppose, but for most people hobbies were unavailable. The thing is we don't live in a pre-industrial world. This has become a modern, post-modern, worldwide web, digital, computer, cell phone, high-tech-whatever, world. I recently heard a commentator say, "We can now conclude the cell phone is officially part of the human body."

It's also hard to find hobbies in the Bible. But we don't live in Bible times either. The relevant question is, "Are there examples and instructions in the Bible that, having understood what the biblical author is saying, we can apply to the idea of having hobbies today?"

Defining a Hobby

Merriam Webster: "a pursuit outside one's regular occupation engaged in especially for relaxation."

New Oxford American Dictionary, "an activity done regularly in one's leisure time for pleasure."

Wikipedia, "a regular activity that is done for enjoyment, typically during one's leisure time."

Conclusion: A hobby is an activity a person does regularly, outside of his or her occupation, which is done for pleasure.

There seems to be five criteria involved in a hobby. A hobby is:

- 1. An activity,** where something is being done – it's not just a state of mind or attitude. For example, meditation, contemplation, and prayer are, by themselves, not hobbies.
- 2. Done regularly,** where something is done on a regular basis. It might be seasonal, but not occasional. If I go fishing every weekend the weather permits, that's a hobby. If I go fishing once or twice a year, that's not a hobby.
- 3. Outside one's occupation,** something not necessary for livelihood. It is not something one is paid to do, or something done during the time of one's employment. Hobbies require the availability of discretionary time.
- 4. Which someone decides to do,** it must be a personal decision, not mandated by someone else (say, a parent or employer) or an organization (say, a religion or a government).
- 5. For pleasure,** "a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment." [New Oxford American Dictionary]

Corollaries to the Definition

Corollary #1, For hobbies, time is essential, but wealth is optional. Hobbies require the availability of discretionary time, but not necessarily discretionary wealth. Kids are throwing basketballs through hoops, and kicking soccer balls on empty plots of ground, all over the world, with minimal financial investment. Our tendency is to put more money into our hobbies as two things increase: our discretionary wealth and our pleasure (defined as our “feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment.” Discretionary time is essential, the investment of wealth is optional.

Corollary #2, Hobbies bring rest from work, if you are working. Rest is “to cease work or movement in order to relax, refresh oneself, or recover strength” [New Oxford American Dictionary]. To “cease work” assumes one is working. The sabbath rest for Israel assumed the Israelites were working (Exodus 20:10). Hobbies cannot bring relaxation to someone who is lazy.

Proverbs 26:14, As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed.

[The activities of people who are not working (say retired or incapacitated) is not being discussed here. The word “hobby” is here only applied as rest for people who are being paid for some other labor.]

Corollary #3, Hobbies are for pleasure, not fun. Fun includes “enjoyment, amusement, or lighthearted pleasure” [New Oxford American Dictionary]. Fun is a ride on a rollercoaster in an amusement park. Hobbies are not just for amusement and not necessarily lighthearted. The pleasure derived from a hobby should not be defined as “fun.”

Corollary #4, Hobbies can be evil. Evil things can be hobbies, but in that case, hobbies have no value (Ecclesiastes 2:8).

But let’s do this.

Instead of just asking if something is a hobby or not, let’s ask how many of these five criteria a certain activity meets. For example, take my writing articles like this one. Certainly, it is #1 an activity #2 done regularly and #4 I decide to do it. But it is also part of my occupation, so it is not #3. And although I enjoy doing it, it is not done for the purpose of pleasure. So, it’s not #5. Therefore, it’s not a hobby. It’s 3/5 of a hobby.

But I also fly an antique airplane (a 1939 Piper J-4 Cub) which fits all five criteria. So, it is a hobby.

Is going to church a hobby? It certainly fits #1 an activity, #2 done regularly, and #3 outside of employment (unless you are a pastor). But if it is done for a sense of obligation (such as your parent’s requirement or a tradition) it does not fit #4. And #5, for pleasure, depends on the individual. So, probably not. But some people will meet all five criteria. For them, churchgoing is a hobby.

Is playing golf a hobby? For most who play it, yes. But I know a man who likes golf, but he is paid by his boss (who bought him a new set of golf clubs and a club membership) to play golf with the company’s customers. For him golf is not always a hobby.

A Hobby in the life of David

David’s music, especially his playing the harp, probably qualifies as a hobby. He wrote,

Psalm 33:1-3 Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy

We don't know the circumstances surrounding David when he began (probably taught himself) to play the harp. Most likely when David was a young boy, his harp playing fit all five criteria of a hobby. When he played it for Saul it was not a choice done for pleasure (1 Samuel 19:9) and when he wrote psalms to be put to music it seems to be part of what David saw as his occupation (David issued the directive *for the choir director* 56 times). Nonetheless, much of David's music seems to be #1 an activity, #2 done regularly, #3 outside of his occupation, #4 as a choice, #5 for pleasure.

Hobbies in the life of Solomon

David's son Solomon pursued something close to hobbies. He wrote,

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11, *All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there is no profit under the sun.*

Solomon's activities meet all the criteria of a hobby, except #3 since he said he considered his pleasure-seeking activities as part of *all my labor*. In that sense they were not true hobbies. But otherwise (4 out of 5) they were. Solomon also made the mistake of having immoral hobbies and thinking they had lasting value, before realizing they didn't. We therefore learn from Solomon that hobbies should not be immoral or seen as having lasting value.

A Hobby in the life of Moses

Moses gave us another activity to consider for hobbies – keeping the sabbath.

Exodus 20:10, *... but the seventh day is a **sabbath** of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.*

For Moses, the sabbath was described as *let no man go out of his place on the seventh day* (Exodus 16:29). In the New Testament times it was described as about a half of a mile (one kilometer).

Acts 1:12, *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a **Sabbath** day's journey away.*

The Sabbath was #1 an activity, #2 done regularly, #3 outside of one's occupation, #5 intended for pleasure since it prevented hard work for hard workers. But it was not #4 a personal decision since it was mandated by the Mosaic Law. From Moses we learn that rest from labor is valuable, and a hobby can provide that.

A Hobby in the life of Jesus

Jesus sought out occasions to be by Himself in a secluded place and told his disciples to do the same.

Matt. 14:13, *Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a **secluded place** by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities.*

Mark 1:35, *In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a **secluded place**, and was **praying** there.*

Mark 6:31-32, *And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a **secluded place** and **rest** a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a **secluded place** by themselves.*

Luke 4:42, *When day came, Jesus left and went to a **secluded place**; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them.*

For Jesus this would qualify as a hobby according to our five criteria. It was #1 an activity, which #2 He did regularly, #3 outside His ministry (occupation), which He #4 decided to do, which was for Him #5 a time of pleasure, since it was a time for prayer to the Father, something Jesus enjoyed. So, an ideal hobby includes doing something we take pleasure in, which God also takes pleasure in.

Hobbies and the New Testament Apostles

First, let's go back to the sabbath. Interestingly, Paul saw sabbath-keeping as a personal choice.

Romans 14:5-6, *One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord ...*

Colossians 2:16, *Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a **Sabbath** day.*

That would mean if one chose to keep a sabbath, and it is for them a non-occupational activity done weekly for pleasure, then it's a hobby. So, under the Mosaic Law, Sabbath keeping was almost, but not exactly, a hobby (because it was mandated), but in the New Testament it could be. Of course, the apostles continually warned about loving the world. Our hobbies should not flirt with immorality.

1 John 2:15-16, *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

But they also spoke of God

1 Timothy 6:17, *...who richly supplies us with all things to **enjoy**.*

Why Christians should have a hobby.

1. The five criteria for a hobby can express biblical ideas. Each criteria defining a hobby: #1 an activity, #2 a person does regularly, #3 outside of his or her occupation, which #4 they decide to do, #5 for pleasure, is illustrated in the Bible in a positive way.

2. Hobbies can allow us to express a gift, talent, or skill that we are thankful for. Hobbies usually require learning some new skill. Since we are involved in a hobby for pleasure, we usually enjoy developing, or having developed, the skills the hobby rewards. Certainly, this can lead to pride. But not necessarily. It can also lead to thankfulness as it did with David concerning his music.

3. Hobbies can allow us to express creativity. Creativity, used for good, has value (Psalm 144:9). God gave it to us, it separates us from the rest of the cosmos and it reflects the character of God. True, creativity in hobbies is only of this world and not eternal (Ecclesiastes 1:14), but the same is true of, at least some of, God's creation. God's creativity included this cosmos and is not permanent. He will destroy it and start over (2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:1-3).

4. A hobby is a good way to be in the world and not of the world. It was important to Jesus that His disciples be in this world, while not being of this world

John 17:15-18, *I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

Hobbies can help a disciple of Jesus Christ to be in the world, not of the world. Hobbies can give us common ground with unbelievers for evangelism.

5. Hobbies help us be more vital, interesting, compelling, significant people. Jesus told His disciples,

Matthew 5:13-16, *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Salt and light represent our understanding of the Word of God. But it's one thing to be salt and light, it's another to *let your light shine before men*. How are we going to be salt and light to the world? Hobbies can help with that. They cannot only plug us into people of the world, but they can make us more knowledgeable. It is harder for people to write us off as a religious nut case when we are vital, interesting, compelling, and significant.

Conclusion

Hobbies should not be sinful or rob time from biblically mandated priorities. But hobbies can be a form of rest (which assumes we are working). Hobbies can allow us to develop our gifts, express our creativity, be in the world without being of the world, and make us more vital people as we express the salt and light of the Word of God to the world.