**Life Lessons**

**THE ACTIVITY OF LIVING WITH PURPOSE:**

**HEALTHY INVESTMENTS OF TIME AND ENERGY**

Science has clearly demonstrated *entropy*, the stark reality that our world is winding down, and slowly running out of energy. The sun and the planets are cooling from their cores, and all living things are deteriorating into death. Most people also believe that like our bodies, our world is running out of time as well. The four-dimensional time-space continuum is apparently running out of gas. So if the world God created is dying, is it therefore inevitable that we are all losing our liveliness?

Most people believe there is a fifth dimension, one that has something to do with sickness and health. It can hasten death, or inspire new life. How do some people seem to get livelier as they age? What is *vitality*? Where does it come from, and can we grow our experience of it? Beyond conceiving children, can we participate in an ongoing process of creating life? Can we tap into something that lets us co-create time, and energy? As our bodies age, can the soul within be getting younger?

We have many choices regarding what to believe about vitality vs. entropy. And those beliefs and mindsets strongly influence many lifestyle choices about how we behave. These choices clearly influence how long we live, and more importantly, *how* *much we and others enjoy our lives*. The key to experiencing a fullness of time and energy is living with a *fruitful purpose.* Here are some ways you can retrain your brain to guide and motivate healthier choices.

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| ***Sickening Beliefs about Vitality*** | ***Healthy Beliefs about Vitality*** |
| If you can’t do something right, don’t bother to get started. *I can’t, so I won’t.* | Do the best you can, and leave the results to God. *We can, and we will.* |
| Why do something you don’t want to do?  Wait until you feel like it. | If it’s important enough, find time for it today, and put your heart into it. |
| When I feel threatened or insignificant, it only makes sense to hunker down and chill. | When I’m down on myself, I refocus on my purpose, and start living for it. |
| Apathy asks, *Who cares?,*  and  *What difference does it make?* | Passion flows from thinking through to find good answers to those questions. |
| Lethargy avoids and laments work, thinking it takes time and energy away from rest and play. | Enthusiasm realizes work, rest, and recreation can all empower each other. |
| Procrastination wastes time by believing we’ll always have plenty of time later on. | Opportunity says time is short, so let’s make the best of it: *carpe diem!* |
| Depression sees talent and opportunity as curses, or even temptations from a critical, punishing God. | Hope sees these as blessings, gifts from a loving, generous, helpful God. |
| Burn-out sees my work as economic necessity, an exhausting bondage to my controlling boss. | Zest sees my employment as voluntary service to my boss and those we serve. |
| Passivity believes that exercise is too painful, and might injure me. | Activity believes being sedentary is too painful, and *it* will injure me. |
| Every investment of my limited time and energy leaves me with less. | When I put first things first, I have better focus and drive for other things too. |

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| ***Sickening Habits with Vitality*** | ***Healthy Habits with Vitality*** |
| Taking pleasure in mooching off others, getting others to do things for us | Taking pride in taking good care of myself and other people |
| I love being entertained by people doing athletic, charming, dramatic, and exciting things. | I am growing my ability to do all those things in my own life. |
| enjoy relaxing, especially when I avoid unpleasant relationships and responsibilities. | I relax *as a part of enjoying* my active responsibilities and relationships. |
| I’m often tired and distracted before the day even starts. | I’m often full of energy and focus, even when I come home after a long day. |
| I’m often seeking my own happiness in selfish pleasures, right now in the short run. | I’m often trying to create the good life for myself and others, down the road. |
| My life feels like a treadmill, staying busy, multi-tasking to look like I’m getting things done. | I leave myself free time to be spontaneous and focused on one thing at a time. |
| I enjoy imagining how passive, residual income can help me retire completely from work at a young age. | The good I do for others means as much to me as money I make for my family. |
| My best friends are the ones who share my interests and passions for my leisure life. | My best friends are the ones who work hard to leave the world a better place. |
| Most of my hopes and prayers are for things to go my way, to go better for me and my loved ones. | Most of my hopes are for me to go God’s way, so God blesses me and others. |
| Other people find it sickening the way I work, rest, and play. | My habits of work, rest, and play leave behind a healthy footprint of wellbeing. |

***The key to having more time and energy is the enthusiastic pursuit of a compelling purpose, one that makes the world a better place for both others and ourselves. We all need to believe in a higher power than inspires us into a life with healthier experiences that only grow in us as we give them away. The ideal higher power for this purpose is the indwelling God of love, joy, and peace, forever providing wellsprings of enthusiasm for life, both within and around us. These are our fountains of youth.***

**Active Stewardship of Time and Energy: Laziness vs. Enthusiasm**

**Laziness** on the surface is apathy, boredom, procrastination, and lethargy. It is a lifestyle of reluctance to work, and addiction to rest and play. The lazy person may be deceived, and say “I can’t” instead of “I won’t.” By always trying to avoid the ridicule of failure, and the rejection which comes from hurting others’ feelings, one can become caught up in habitual sins of omission.

The antidote to this is **Enthusiasm**, which is the inspired dedication to work hard in service to God and others. It requires an appreciation of the precious scarcity of our time and energy. We must recognize our talents and opportunities, and see that God’s giving them to us grants us both responsibility and a source of self-respect.

**Laziness** is an insidious attitude, growing on us suddenly without our awareness. Before we know it, it has come upon us, and is taking us into financial or spiritual poverty (**Pr 24: 30-34**). Separated from God, work begins to seem like a curse (**Gen 3: 17-19**). We may even want to mooch off others (**2 Thess 3: 7-13**), or expect believers to take care of our family for us (**1Tim 5:8**). We rationalize our laziness as due to fear (**Pr 26:13**), fatigue (**vv. 14-15**), and cleverness (**v. 16**), but none of these are valid excuses. Here are some ways to overcome our lethargy and apathy, and live with **Enthusiasm**:

Celebrate (as Jews historically have) both work and play as gifts from God meant to be enjoyed. (**Eccl 3: 9-13, 5: 18-20; and 9: 9-10**). See your occupation as a loving service to your Heavenly Father, not to your earthly boss (**Col 3:17, 23-24**).

Believe that with indwelling Holy Spirit, we have the very enthusiastic life of God coming through us. Read about God’s enthusiasm in **Isaiah 40: 25-31**, where we learn that those who wait and hope in God can “renew their strength . . . can run and not grow weary.”

Learn from the ants that there’s a time to work and a time to play (**Prov 6: 6-11**), so that our hunger and poverty, or our potential for it, or the needs of others, can motivate our work (**Prov 16:26, 2 Thess 3:10**).

Realize that time is short, so make every moment count (**Psalm 90:12**). Jesus warns us that he may come back and we may die at any time (**Matt 24: 37-51**). Surrounding that teaching, Jesus told us three poignant stories to illustrate the urgency of life, teaching us to consider our talents and opportunities as gifts from God, comparing our accomplishments not to others’ but to what we could be doing (**Matt 24: 14-30**); to serve other people unselfishly in the faith that as we bless others, we are blessing the Lord Himself (**Matt 24: 31-46**); and always to be ready for death (**Matt 25: 1-13**).

Finally, we can look away from what we used to be (our sinful past), and focus our attention on the future, on how we are becoming more like Christ (**Philippians 3: 10-14**).

**RAISING CHILDREN WHO AREN’T LAZY:**

**TEACHING *STEWARDSHIP* OF TIME AND TALENT**

*Laziness steals from people*. It takes away their time, energy, optimism, confidence, spontaneity, joy, mental focus, and their zest for life. In return, it leaves them with more depression, boredom, discouragement, and addictions. It damages life for everyone around them.

Children naturally make excuses for their laziness. Most parents don’t want lazy children, but they often believe these excuses, and start doing their kids’ homework or chores for them. Instead, you can teach your children that everyone’s opportunities and abilities are *invisible* *gifts from their creator God*. Just as with visible gifts, the more time and energy your kids put into them, the more they will enjoy them. Adults will enjoy them too: they’ll coach up your children’s abilities, and give them *more* opportunities.

Children need their parents to model healthy attitudes and lifestyles, *balancing work, rest, and recreation,* celebrating how each is needed to enhance the others. Let them see your work be a vocation that along with the money gives you joy, friendships, challenge, and fulfillment from helping others.

***Preschool Years***

If toddlers who can speak are indulged for whining, they won’t ever learn what they want, or how to ask for it. This laziness stops when parents say *“Don’t whine. Use your words. Ask me for what you need.”* And if whining continues, parents need to calmly yet firmly close a door between them, and stay disengaged until words are used appropriately. This requires finding the peace and courage not to cave to your anxiety. Preschoolers really want to please you, so tell them how proud and happy you are with every helpful, creative, and self-reliant thing they do.

***Elementary School***

Here are some verbal comebacks for children’s lazy behavior. For their **boredom**: *“I enjoyed playing with you before, but I need to get back to work. You can figure out what you need to do now.”* For **procrastinating chores**: *“The sooner you get started, the easier and more fun it will be.”* For **fatigue**: *“If you’re so tired, you can go to bed earlier tonight.”* Be consistent in giving them what their behavior says they need, not what their words demand. More mature 10-year-olds can do chores for small allowances.

***Middle School***

These are the best years to give your kids **a work ethic and an attitude of *stewardship****.* Help them to see their talents, passions, and opportunities as gifts (see the second paragraph above). **Manage your own passions and opinions** to show your children both love and respect (see the last paragraph below). At this age many make professions of faith, and you doing these things helps them see God as a giver of abilities and opportunities who loves *and* challenges them. Teach them that until they learn to use their time and talents to bless themselves *and* others, both now *and* down the road, they will be disappointed in this life *and* the next. Teach them that money earned works the same way: money that’s invested and shared with others will grow, and what’s indulged selfishly will never seem to be enough.

For young adolescent **boredom,** you could tell them to think of all the ways they could bless others *and* themselves right now*.*  For **exhaustion,** tell them that mental and physical exercise creates energy. **Too busy**: tell them to write down where all their time goes, and explain to you if they think the big chunks are really the most important. **Screen addictions**: tell them that their phone/video games have taken them away from life and other people. You’ll give their screens back when they’ve learned to enjoy real life again.**Resentment for your discipline:** Tell them,*“It’s not me you don’t like, it’s yourself. You’ll like yourself better when you stop wasting your time and talent.”*

***High School***

Some verbal comebacks for **boredom in late adolescence:** *“What you’re doing won’t be worth much, and it won’t be much fun for you either, until you put your heart, mind, body, and soul into it.”* **Apathy:** *“You say you don’t care, but deep down, we both know you do.”* **Wanting to quit something important:** *“Your family and best friends are proud of you for trying and learning new ways to make the world a better place for us all.”*

In short, remember that when you respond to laziness by being tense, critical, or guilty, *your children are downloading their negativity into you,* and that only rewards it. Instead, be calm, brief, and pleasant, and then disengage with a smile until they bring themselves out of it. This is the best way to *inspire and reward their enthusiasm for life.*