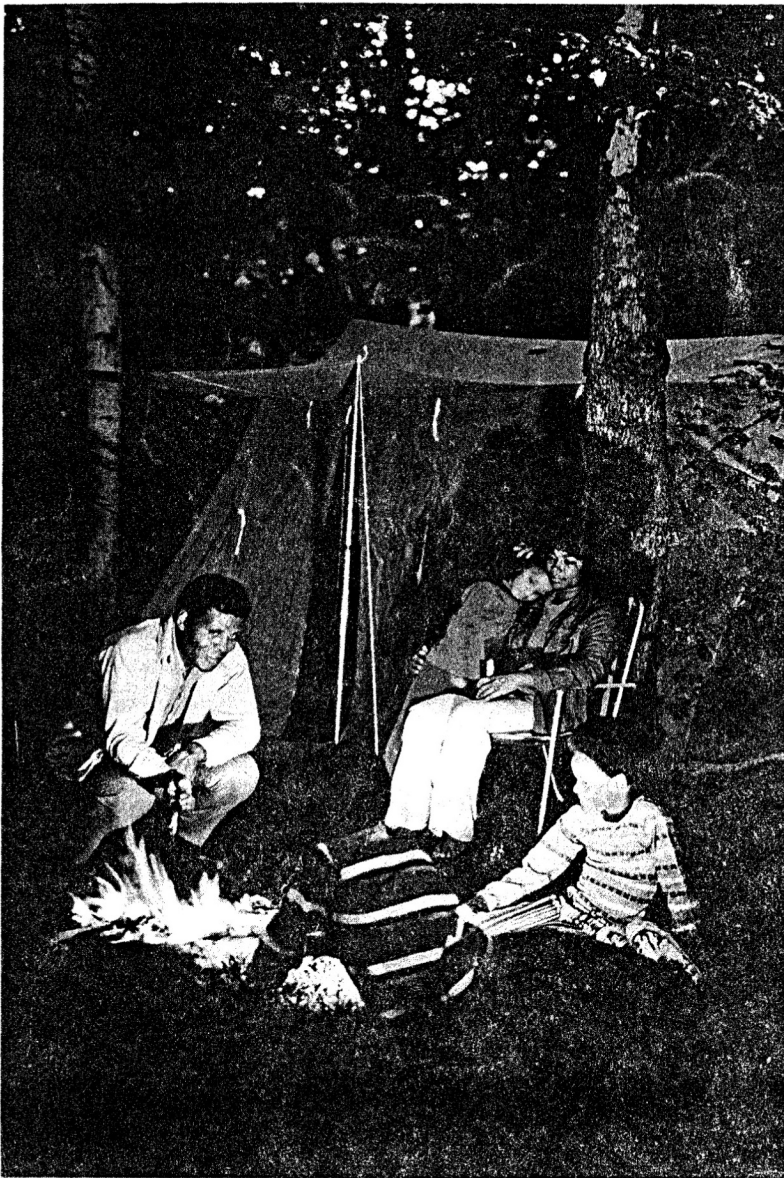


Health and Religion/by Warren Heckman

The pastor and his pastime

If your philosophy is "better burn out than rust out," and if you have been heard to say, "If Jesus is always on the job, can I do less?" then you had better read this article!



H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS

Never take a day off!" The respected elder pastor had such an authoritative tone to his voice and such a spiritual expression on his countenance that my attention was immediately captured. "After all," he clinched his point, "if Jesus is always on the job, can I do less? Besides, I'd rather burn out for the Lord than rust out!"

I was impressed! I was challenged! Indeed, I was so ashamed at my lack of consecration and commitment to the Christ I had publicly professed as my Lord and Master, I slunk away to pray and renew my willingness to offer myself as a "living sacrifice."

But I had a wonderful wife and a beautiful baby daughter, and my new zeal began to be a problem. My wife stopped me one day and solemnly asked whether I'd missed my calling.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, it seems to me you should have been a Catholic priest or a celibate Protestant pastor without wife or children. Then you'd be happy, and we'd be happy too, since we wouldn't expect any of your time, or attention, or care."

That hurt! I had to go to God again. Prayer helps one get a proper perspective.

God reminded me of several senior ministers I admired and loved, all of whom seemed to subscribe to the "All out, burn out, for Christ and the church" concept. One by one they passed before my mind—children away from God, never attending church. Now, in middle age, many were experiencing severe health problems. It seemed God was saying, "That is where you are heading with your false sense of spirituality."

"But, Lord," I protested, "it's all for You. I'd love to be home with my family one or two nights a week, to be able to go fishing, to have a hobby or take an honest-to-goodness vacation that doesn't double as a preaching mission, to relax."

Then God said, "Did you ever read what I did on the seventh day?" Ouch! Later I just happened to read in the Bible that Jesus said to His disciples, "Come

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away with Me. We must rest awhile" (see Mark 6:31).

About that time I attended a conference to hear a man who pastored the largest Pentecostal church I'd ever heard of. As "chance" would have it, one of his subjects was the necessity for pastors to show a good example of family life by giving adequate time, love, and attention to their own wives and children! He said he reserved two nights a week for his family, and nothing except death (either his or a parishioner's) would take him away from his appointment at home on those nights. If he could have a successful church and maintain that schedule, why couldn't I?

In my traveling ministry I had been in many pastors' homes. As I reflected I realized that two extremes existed in the ministry: pastors tended to be either workaholics or loafaholics.

Why was I increasingly becoming a workaholic?

Was it pride, camouflaged as humility? "Look, everyone, see how much I love God, the church, the ministry?"

Was it inferiority overcompensating in frenetic activity?

Was it unbelief? "I can't trust God to do what He's promised, so I'd better do it myself."

Was it insecurity? "If I don't perform like superman, they may vote me out."

Was it uncertainty of my call, my salvation, my qualifications, my success, God's blessing?

Was it guilt that drove me to work longer and harder, always trying to do better?

Was it a sincere burden, a genuine love for God and man and a burning desire to

fulfill my call?

It really didn't matter, I finally decided. If I continued neglecting my family or my body, I'd eventually be out of commission. The law of diminishing returns would nail me to the wall. As I thought about it, I realized I regularly put in sixteen-hour days, seven days a week, for a weekly average of 100 to 115 hours. Yet in all that time there was almost no physical exercise. I was sitting at a desk, riding in a car, visiting in a home, and, you guessed it, eating lots of pie and ice cream.

God gave me two goals regarding these areas of my life:

First, to give my family priority (see Titus 1:6). No, I wouldn't neglect my call, the church, or the Christians in it. But sixty to seventy-five hours a week devoted to my ministry should be adequate. Monday will be my day off for family, relaxation, and fun. Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons [Seventh-day Adventist pastors could easily substitute other times] I will try to reserve as family times, with a variety of interesting experiences.

Second, to exercise faithfully, enjoy hobbies, and keep my weight near what it was the year I graduated from high school.

Not everyone enjoys exercise, and few pastors can afford expensive equipment. But all can take brisk walks, jog, skip rope, or do calisthenics, and watch the diet. Our pastoral staff has taken up the challenge of racquetball and unashamedly tries to play once or twice a week. Our family now owns a boat and, though it cost less than a thousand dollars, it has brought a million dollars' worth of family fun, togetherness,

and learning. Whether fishing, water-skiing, or simply riding, we're away from the pressure, demand, and spotlight of pastoring. My family has me, all of me, for that Monday and/or Saturday afternoon; I'm not being shared with several hundred other hurting, needy, or even happy people.

The church knows now that Monday is our family day and is proud of it. My family knows every Monday is their day, and they love me for it.

God has been most gracious to me as a result of my new life style. Our children are a great spiritual asset, and I have enjoyed outstanding health, exceptional energy, and unflagging enthusiasm and excitement at being in the ministry.

I believe we sin against our bodies and our families when we neglect them week after week. I believe it is sinful to go against God's plan of setting aside one day a week as a day of rest. I believe we can get far more done in five and a half (long) days each week than in seven if we have been refreshed in body, soul, spirit, mind, will, and emotion.

I challenge you, pastors, to change your life style if you are neglecting these areas of your life. Yes, it would seem more spiritual to say, "Pray more; witness more; give more; do more; go more." But my counsel to the workaholic pastor is "Stay at home more and exercise more."

My voice may not carry the same tone of authority as that of the pastor I once esteemed for his prodigious efforts, nor my countenance exhibit such an aura of spirituality, but I raise my voice unhesitatingly in defense of a balanced program of work, family, and physical fitness.

The coronary club

With more and more preachers becoming victims of heart attacks, the coronary club is extending membership to those who only a few years ago were considered much too young to be admitted. No doubt many preachers, young and old, are seeking membership but have lacked information on how to become members. The following rules, if followed, will assure speedy action toward membership:

1. Never say No.
2. Insist on being liked by, and trying to please, everyone.
3. Never delegate responsibility. If you must appoint a committee, do all the work yourself.
4. Never plan a day off, but if you are forced to take one, visit a preacher friend and spend the day talking about church problems, yours and his.
5. Never plan a night at home, but if it

ever happens that you have no meetings or calls, be sure to accept an outside speaking engagement.

6. Take all the revivals your church will tolerate; then book more for your vacations. (Place all honorariums in a special account marked Heart Fund. This will help pay medical expenses when your coronary comes.)

7. Never allow enough time to drive comfortably to an appointment. (This will do two things: show people how busy you are; protect the reputation preachers have as fast drivers.)

8. Watch attendance records, especially the Sunday school's. If they lag a bit, decide it's time to move and always wonder what caused the people to dislike you.

9. When the doctor advises you to slow down, ignore him and brag about the fact that you would rather wear out than rust out.

10. Be sure to beat the record of the former pastor and try hard to beat your own each year.

11. Take the burden of your people to the Lord, but don't leave it there. Play God and pretend that the kingdom depends on you.

12. Lead your church into a building program whether they need it or not; consider yourself better qualified than the architect and give it your personal supervision.

13. Consider it your civic duty to be a member of every club in town and become president of as many as you can.

14. If having done all these, you don't succeed, accept the largest church you can find and work very tirelessly. You should then have a coronary within six months.—George W. Miller, *Pulpit Helps*, AMG International, Chattanooga, Tennessee.