

EDIFYING SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

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I greet each one present in the precious name of Jesus. We believe that God has provided all things for us that pertain unto life and godliness for a full, rich satisfying life. ([2 Peter 1:3](#))

This evening as we have this assignment on Edifying Social Activities I have a very simple formula for a very complex problem if you want to call it that. We are social beings, we have social needs we certainly acknowledge that and those needs are going to be met some way or other and I believe that the formula is very simple as we look at the scriptures.

The title already suggests that edifying, maybe I should simply define that word before we go further.

Edifying according to Webster's is: "...to edify is to instruct or to improve spiritually." Well that don't give us a whole lot of room in relation to social interests, activities, "...to instruct or improve spiritually or to instruct or to improve especially the moral and religious knowledge, furthermore to enlighten things that contribute spiritually."

Looking at the word social now, we said we are social beings, social is the idea of companionship with one's friends or associates, it is interdependent relationships with one's fellows as the dictionary would say it, or interaction of the individual and the group. And so in order for it to be on edifying social activity why we need to determine whom it is we can have interaction or social exchange with.

I think that is very simple, if it is going to contribute spiritually we will have to decide, to determine as parents, as young people who it is that we can relate to socially that will make that kind of contribution.

What it is we already implied. Since we are social beings everything we do with others has either social benefits or else it is negative, it is a social exchange any time we are with other people, that makes it rather simple to consider this subject because it is not just simply planned special events related to social needs we might say but it is actually whenever we are with other people, we're interacting and exchanging socially. That word social would define it that way.

I would like to for a base have you turn with me to Psalm four.

We would like to notice a few things from this Psalm that I think can contribute to this message this evening. I am going to read the entire Psalm four, he says:

[Psalm 4:1-8](#)

"Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer."

I gather from that verse there it is our response to God in relation to their spiritual need and His response toward delivering us from our bondage to sin, high take that from that verse hear my prayer, have mercy upon me. Then God says:

"[2] O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after *leasing*? Selah. [3] But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him. [4] Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. [5] Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord. [6] There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. [7] Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. [8] I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

I think we have in this Psalm here a number of thoughts, instructions relating to our social needs.

Since we are social beings as we already said, naturally the social pressures of our society and their effects upon us, the promises of social exchange with the world does touch us, touch our spirits and has a means of making it look interesting or inviting at times, we acknowledge that. But God says in relation to us this evening: How long will you turn My glory into shame, how long will you ye love vanity, and seek after *leasing*? Now of those two words vanity and leasing, *leasing* is that of falsehood and deceitfulness we would relate that to the idea of the emphasis that is placed to day on social programs, whether it be a

church community or business. We live in a society that is bent we might say it to this evil, it does affect us because we naturally are affected by the communities in which we live. Community gatherings, entertainments, socials, it is a popular thing in some communities today to have neighborhood socials and the Amish and the Mennonite and the Brethren and the Baptists and the worldling and usually maybe they all are, but they are altogether and they have a wonderful time together socially and this was just real fine and wonderful, and it looks good on the surface that I see that as a form of falsehood and deception because of the inroads that it makes in our minds and in our children in relation to where family and social needs are met, it is a type of leasing.

Now this idea of vanity carries with it, we know what that is, but it is emptiness, a worthless thing, vain, to no purpose and finally we would say that it is spiritually destitute and that is how we define whether it is something that we can engage in or not. What does it do to us spiritually? It is spiritually destitute in relation to community gatherings or in relation to churches strong social programs where they have that.

I well remember as a young person in the home congregation of the emphasis, there were a number of young men, married men, that wanted to play ball and they did play ball until the Ministry challenged that and it was almost I would say a fight, they were vicious, they wanted to do what they want to do because of the social benefits, that was if I remember correctly that was finally put under. But then do social thing came in the backdoor you might say and the last few years that we were in that congregation once a year there was a social gathering of all the families in one of the members' meadows for a supper and some ball playing and suchlike and that the ministry reluctantly went along with, but what did it do? Well time tells us what it does. It looked very innocent but it finally it come to that.

The business world. We live in a time when a lot of emphasis is put on banquets and shows and you could go on an on and I simply say that this is vanity, it is leasing, it is falsehood, it is deceptive, it will make it inroads among us if we respond to that and we want to beware of it.

Two things we might note further, those two words we found in verse two of this Psalm, verse three says: But know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for Himself. For Himself. He has chosen people He has set apart people and finally we are not determining what is proper by our personal feelings or what is socially acceptable but we again do determine that by another means, a means that is safer than that and God has set us apart for that. He says: Stand in awe, and sin not. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and I relate that to our social interests, sacrifices of righteousness, put your trust in the Lord. And then we have the promise of gladness in heart and peace and we lay down in peace and sleep: For thou Oh Lord only maketh me dwell in safety." It is the safe way it is the honourable way, the God honoring way.

Now I would like to share two Bible examples of what I consider the sense of direction that we want to move in this evening so that you know what we are thinking in relation to what we consider edifying social activities.

First of all you may turn with me to Exodus 32, an Old Testament account, and this account happens to be a happening that happened with the people of God, it is something that is very similar to some of the things that happen today and it is not foreign to us. Exodus 32 you have a people not at rest here spiritually, you have a people that are hankering for something, they feel like that there is something missing so therefore there has to be an answer to this vacuum that is in their experience. Starting at verse one:

[Exodus 32:1-6](#)

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. [2] And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. [3] And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. [4] And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel,

which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. [5] And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord.” (You can call that a social if you want to) “[6]And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings;” (a type of worship in this social, very common) “and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”

Play - The end result of this social, this gathering.

A few things we have noticed I already implied, I see this occasion as a result of a spiritual lack or malady or a deficiency, they were missing something in their worship and they sought a substitute, and isn't that true of us socially when we the church reach out with a social gospel, a social program, isn't the reason to fill a spiritual gap? I certainly think it is. Or if our people find the need to seek after programs other than what is edifying it is an indication of a spiritual deficiency or lack, and it was because of this deficiency that the people requested their leader to provide an answer in their time of need and it ended up as a social which God brought judgment upon.

We also have in this account failure due to a leader taking heed to the request of the people. And I think that this, it is not that we hold something over the people, but if we have a deficiency in our congregations and there comes a request for a social program we need to see beyond that request to the real need and not give in to the desire of the people in relation to social program but rather fill that need spiritually and the other will find its place.

Now I would like to use an example from the gospel of Luke, it gives us the other side of the picture. Luke two starting to read at verse 41. You have Jesus as a 12 year old here when his parents took him up to Jerusalem to worship now it says:

[Luke 2:41-52](#)

“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. [42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. [43] And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. [44] But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. [45] And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. [46] And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. [47] And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. [48] And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. [49] And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? [50] And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. [51] And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. [52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

Here we have a social activity that edifies and why? Why because it is due to a proper worship activity and also to parents filling their rightful place, they went up to Jerusalem to worship.

I said we have a simple formula and those two illustrations give you an idea of what we see as edifying social activities.

Solomon's answer to the world's appeal, and he sought it out, he sought it out as far as any man could and he says finally it is vanity and vexation of spirit. ([Eccl. 1:14; 2:11, 17, 22 & 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9](#))

And if we don't believe that it doesn't take a lot of reading or listening to the world's system, I said the world's system has a strong social program, it doesn't take long to determine that many of the things that they are engaging in and those who engage in it to the full are often ending up in drugs and sometimes suicide. Many, many times it is the course that takes people onto vanity and vexation of spirit. God's answer is that it is idolatry and moral corruptness which finally leads to separation and eternal judgment.

Now in relation to edifying social activities I would like to ask, I would like to consider the question: Who is responsible in order to meet these needs? Now who is responsible, is the church responsible?

The church's responsibility. I am going to share in a few different areas.

I know this gets a bit tedious and it isn't always appreciated but finally for us to have social activities that edify, the church must continue to be negative to the wrong social inroads.

We will have to continue to inform our people and help our people to see what the wrong social inroads are and what they will do to us. That is one aspect of the church's responsibility.

Furthermore the church is responsible to its calling to maintain a strong spiritual Fellowship. When I think of a strong spiritual Fellowship I think of that which we have, many of us are enjoying, and that is finally what satisfies our social needs by and large. I already pointed out that there was a lack in Israel when the cry came and that the leadership responded to that cry.

When the church assumes the responsibility to provide a social program we have failed our calling. That is not our calling but our calling is, as I said, to maintain a strong spiritual Fellowship. Furthermore relating to that is that of maintaining an aggressive outreach program, there are side effects upon both of these that contribute to us socially; it is not without reason that it is a secondary part of these things and we will touch on that a bit later. A strong spiritual program provides many social benefits, many social benefits.

I think that is all I will share it on this point in relation to the church. Now we want to consider parents.

The parental responsibility.

We could ask the question how much attention should parents give to social needs and also what kind of attention?

First of all I would say a healthy home and church life, a balanced healthy home and church life will provide for the social needs of our family, it will do that. We have a few negative warnings here in [Proverbs 21:17](#): "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man:" We would take that spiritually especially because of the negative effect that it has upon us.

[Isaiah 58:13](#) gives a warning against doing thy pleasure on My holy day.

That there relates to the Lord's Day and what we are finally doing on that day in relation to meeting our social needs. God warns us against doing our pleasure on His holy day.

Furthermore we have the warning against the subtle efforts of Satan to destroy through wrong social interests. We need this evening, we need to be aware of the plight of many Christians in relation to social activities we could say perhaps, I get this statement from a book I have at home he simply calls it: Feeding on Spiritual Sewage. Social activities and games and what have you they try to have some spiritual implications with it but the writer, a non Mennonite writer, calls it Spiritual Sewage, it is very damaging, it is like eating out of a garbage pail or worse than that. Or furthermore calling it engaging in the world's play mania. We live in a society and I don't need to tell you, but we could say is almost play crazy, live to play and live for social activities, and we call that a plague amongst Christians just like the plague that was over Egypt, it is very negative, it is very destructive and let us not be caught in that.

Now some positive answers.

There is in relation to parental responsibilities, there is a definite place for family projects, where we do things together as a family, and I am not all negative to some of that where perhaps nothing relates to the church, I think an occasional trip to a place of interest can be alright but it should never contradict or interfere with the spiritual. Places of interest in doing it together as a family, I remember as a child doing some of that, in those days it wasn't done as near as extensively as some think they'd must today and I would warn against that because of what it can do to us.

Some more positive answers, I am not even going to suggest places there is so many and my subject doesn't relate to that anyway, we will let you determine that. But I do have some very positive answers to

what we can do that I think we ought to take heed to in relation to edifying social activities and that is family visits.

That has proven itself through time to be very productive when families visit together in homes and these need to be engaged in more than with relatives or a few social friends, close friends, but definitely family visits and we owe it to our children to get into the various homes within our Fellowship for visits. The social benefits are many and as our children get older they ought to enjoy the benefit of hearing their fathers and mothers can verse and sharing on things that contribute spiritually and help them find some of their own answers in life rather than running off by themselves and engaging in activities that possibly don't have much benefit.

Furthermore we already suggested family travel, but I am suggesting something relating to District Meetings, Church wide Meetings, outlying areas, some of you local people here it would be healthy if you visit at perhaps more the Mechanicsville's and the Wolcott's (other likeminded churches) **and** so on, they deeply appreciate it and as families especially you can say something to your children through that when you can't tell them any other way. There are benefits not only with meeting with those families in those distant areas but the travel time together when you can sing together and share together, there are social needs that are being met in a healthy environment that is certainly a blessing.

I would say in relation to that fathers and mothers, that there are times that are more critical than others in relation to doing things like that. When you have teenagers in your home don't leave it up to chance or happening, just letting them going where they want to go but plan to do things together and plan to take them to meetings, it costs something to you, maybe you would rather rest or something else, but take them. Go as a family to distant other meetings, District Meetings and places like that, you owe it to them socially and you are meeting needs.

I have appreciated some of our local families, I have sensed that they have done this many times and in our area it is not just simply packing up and past three churches of our own kind and another one within 5 miles or such like, maybe it's not quite that bad we believe that you live pretty close, but it involves a lot of miles sometimes, they are willing to do that for their children's sake and that is honourable and it is a positive answer to social needs.

I would say that we as parents, I wanted you to get this, we as parents set the stage for our children's social interests. If we loved to party and to flirt with the world we whet appetites within them that will be hard to overcome, that will be hard to overcome. We set the stage. I guess I get a little concerned sometimes in relation to birthday parties, I am not altogether negative to them but every time there is a birthday, Father's Day, Mother's Day we have all have to get together as a family, and that is a social gathering right but there is so many other good things to do and that can create a party spirit within our children that isn't always healthy, and we want to be cautious of that. We finally set the stage for that in our homes.

I would simply say; plan to go up to Jerusalem that they might benefit spiritually and socially as Jesus parents did.

We recognize that in making these suggestions we are acknowledging the secondary benefits of Bible meetings, Bible conferences, Bible School, Street meetings, cottage meetings, Star distribution (a church evangelistic publication) and we could go on and on. Those programs are not planned for the social benefits but we recognize the social benefits that go with them, they very definitely do. Friendships are developed through these various means that are lasting friendships, not only that they are the right kind of friendships, the kind that edify and you can look and back reflect on it, go to bed at night and as the psalmist said: Rest in peace, because finally we were doing the Lord's work, we were engaged in His business as Jesus and His parents were and the secondary benefits were a part of it and we enjoyed it all.

We want to ever keep those lines clear. I know young person it is easy perhaps to go where the crowd is on Sunday evening for the social benefits and forget the main reason for being there, let's remember that. We guard this by how we talk afterward and how we do afterward and before. Fellowship is vital.

I say we still thrive on spiritual Fellowship, it is so vital to us but let's keep our lines clear that it is on the spiritual level and not just simply a social level.

Now moving on in relation to some other activities.

These things aren't altogether foreign to you I trust, but as I reflect on family life and things that contribute I would like to furthermore suggest that parents and young people plan to visit the aged, the sick, the widows, the poor, your ministry, the old people's home, leaving the community people with a positive purpose, I say plan to do these things. Some young people think Oh my, what benefits could be in that? I have heard many a testimony of young people that felt maybe a little bit negative about doing things like that and after they did it they only realized the benefits, that they were the beneficiaries, God honours those type of visits.

They are edifying social activities, it gives you, especially with aged people, it gives you a glimpse into the past that is often healthy and it helps you to see that they faced issues as you do, it is not like we live in a different generation, a new-age and they are not able to relate to our problems, that isn't true at all, they faced very similar circumstances, they have an answer to many of the conflicts that you might face and finally it is God honoring and it will prove a blessing. I say that these are all social activities that will edify.

Finally our social interests and activities either will make or break us. It is that simple, it will either make or break us. If it is the cause of disobedience it is wrong, if it is the cause of development and opening the door of spiritual opportunity it is right.

But let us remember it is not possible for the church to provide a social programme and to remain spiritual.

That which we have I am convinced can and will meet our needs as we avail ourselves of it. We do not need a lot of extras, a lot of other things to fill the vacuum when there is a spiritual Fellowship.

Parents, young people this evening let's lay hold upon that which satisfies the inner man, that which has lasting values, that which has it eternal values.

The Bible simply says this: And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man. ([Luke 2:52](#))

Isn't that the increase that we want? Isn't that the increase we want our children to have? Well certainly. Wisdom, stature, carries the idea of spiritual maturity, a growing maturity, toward spiritual maturity and that naturally as wisdom and that kind of stature grows it brings us into favor with God and man. I can't think of any benefits for my sons and daughters, for our young people than that kind of the benefit. Exercise profiteth little. ([1 Tim. 4:8](#)) Solomon says: It is better, it is much better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. ([Eccl.7:2](#))

When we think this evening of social activities what do we think of? Well too often we think the very thing that God brought to judgment on Israel for, eating and drinking and playing. God still frowns on a pursuit of that kind of activity but as we find ourselves going up to the house of worship with our parents and sharing with the old men as Jesus did, I would think of them as aged men, aged pillars in the Jewish religion, sharing with them, why they both benefited.

The Bible says that He increased.

May God help us to this end.