

Are idle hands the devil's workshop?

“Idle hands are the devil's workshop.” Sounds like it's straight out of the Bible, doesn't it? In a college Shakespeare class, the professor read several proverbs. Most of the students couldn't tell which of the pithy sayings came from Scripture and which originated with the playwright from Stratford-upon-Avon.

Whence this advice about idle hands? You can't find it on any pages between Genesis and Revelation. Frankly, I'd like to know its origin. Bartlett's doesn't identify it. It's somewhat true. But too many parents embrace it as unchallenged truth.

It needs serious inquiry. Acceptance of the saying makes parents anxious. They fear having their children idle or bored for a minute. So the kids take lessons, play sports, participate in something different every day. The folks frantically taxi them. Merchants get fat selling moms and dads toys and games to occupy the kids in the little time they spend at home.

What results? The drive to keep kids' hands from being the devil's workshop spins them into lifelong restlessness. The kids become tired, tense and sick; the parents, distraught and broke. Then kids and parents spend really expensive, boring times in the waiting rooms of doctors, psychiatrists, and social workers.

Solitude is healthy. Kids need idle time. Freedom to have unstructured contemplation helps children mentally and physically. Let them sit in the branches of trees to watch caterpillars crawl, gaze at scudding clouds or count the petals on daisies. Children trained on itineraries will make themselves and other people crazy seeking escape from boredom. The Bible shows superior wisdom, **"There is . . . a time to be silent," Ecclesiastes 3:7.**