

Dear Friend,

As you read this, our family will be on vacation in Door County. As I've been thinking about leaving our regular routines and going away from our home I've been thinking about the perils and promises of vacations.

Here, it seems to me, are a few of the perils of vacation. First, I think there is the peril of unrealistic expectations. This peril is greater for those of us who are in highly stressful circumstances or jobs or perhaps disappointing family relationships. It is easy to expect that simply "changing the scenery," as it were, will somehow take away the worry or restore the fractured relationships. We envision relaxing by the lake reading a book or sharing warm, "cuddly" moments around the fire at night, which will immediately restore our energy or repair our relationships. While these moments may offer opportunities to deal with our worry or have renovating conversations yet stress will not go away and relationships will not automatically be repaired because we left our home and normal routines behind.

A second peril of vacations is that we not only take a vacation from our job and normal, daily routines but we take a vacation from God and from living like Christians. For those of us who like routines this is a particularly difficult peril to overcome. We habitually read our Bibles and pray but the minute we get out of our routine, we stop. It's easy to take a vacation from worshipping with God's people on the Lord's Day or with our families in Family Worship, while on vacation. It's easy to overindulge our appetite for food and entertainment in ways that don't really promote a life a faith. We are more easily seduced into spending money we don't have when on vacation.

A third peril is that of making our vacations so full of "having fun" that we return home needing to take a vacation from our vacation!! Out of a concern to make the most of our free time or to give the children a memorable experience we pack our time so full of "fun" activities that we are completely worn out by the time we return home. I think this peril is often connected to the first peril in that we expect "having fun" to somehow rejuvenate us. What we discover is that we've only burned ourselves out on all the "fun."

The greatest promise vacations hold out is unstructured time and freedom to do things that we don't "normally" get to do. Spending unstructured time with family members just "hanging out" is one of those things that we often do not have time to "normally" do. We should make efforts to intentionally use this free time with our families in large blocks of unstructured time and seek to engage in meaningful conversation. Don't fritter away all this free time pursuing various entertainments. How many of us regularly wish we had time for extended prayer or meditation upon God's word or time to read substantial books? Don't be afraid of blocking out that time while on vacation to be by yourself to read and pray. I think we need to plan to use this time to feed our souls, not just entertain ourselves with a larger diet of pop culture junk food than we would get at home. At the same time, this is the time for parents to enter into the things that their children enjoy doing. This is a time to play and to have fun with those you love. It is time to hike and fish and canoe and to enjoy God's creation in ways that you wouldn't

normally do. It is a time to explore some of the historical, cultural and natural wonders of the world. Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge one of the best uses of this unstructured time, at least for those workaholics among us, you can use the extra time to sleep in and thus repair your physical body.

Vacations, if we are wise in our approach to them, can refresh and rejuvenate, and prepare us to be more ready and able to take on our God-assigned tasks and responsibilities when we come home. In short, we should not live to go on vacation but we should go on vacation in order to live. Vacations can serve us by freeing us up to engage in those relationship building, soul feeding, body refreshing activities that prepare us to be more faithful servants of Christ in our homes, communities, church and jobs. Pray for my family and I, as we are away, that we would wisely invest this time for his glory and our joy. I will pray for you as you get away this summer.

Relaxing to his glory,