

PERSPECTIVE

JULY 2024



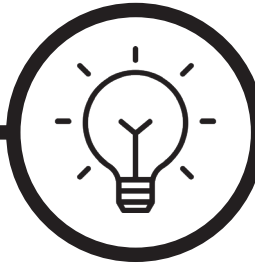
Is there a
CHRISTIAN WAY
to Vacation?

PASSPORT CONTROL
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CONTENTS



ARTICLE 1
Is There a Christian Way to Vacation?
Garry Hill



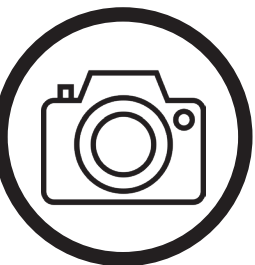
BOOK HIGHLIGHT 5
Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation
Written by Daniel M. Doriani
Recommended by Jack Roberson



BOOK HIGHLIGHT 6
Wellness for the Glory of God: Living Well After 40 with Joy and Contentment in All of Life
Written by John Dunlop, MD
Recommended by Deana Menikoff



BIBLE READING PLAN 7
Take Up & Read
July



NEW MEMBERS 8
Andrea Balsalobre, Laura Booth, Anna Lavendar, Blake Pullen, Nathan & Alex Schuh, and Zach & Meredith Rodgers

Is There a *Christian* Way to Vacation?

I really enjoy a good vacation. An estimated 118 million Americans will take a vacation this summer. Are you among them? You might even be reading this article on vacation! Taking time away from work has become ingrained in our culture. Countless songs, movies, television shows, books, and magazines are dedicated to travel. So, as we spend a year thinking about work as a church family, it is only appropriate that we take a break and spend some time thinking about vacation.

Last month, Chad Ireland did an excellent job helping us think about what the Bible says about rest, drawing a distinction between leisure and rest. Beginning with Genesis 2, Scripture outlines God's plan for rest. While the Bible has clear guidance about rest, the Word doesn't specifically talk about vacation. This article aims to help us consider how we should approach vacationing as Christians.

Technology has played a significant role in the creation of the vacation industry. Before automobiles and airplanes, vacationing was just an extended break from work. But in the more recent past, vacationing for many of us includes travel. The global travel industry is expected to surpass \$7 trillion this year or roughly 7.5% of the Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—this is big business. As such, we want to be thoughtful about how we engage our vacation time. Let me reiterate: Scripture does not discuss vacationing aside from our command to rest from work. We want to be mindful that the Bible's silence on this topic doesn't mean the topic isn't important, but instead that this is an area where there is a lot of freedom in Christ. For example, we know there are significant cultural influences on how people vacation. The average American enjoys 20.7 days of vacation annually (up from 17 days in 2017). Our European friends are enjoying 30 days of "holiday" per year. Again, the Bible isn't clear on this topic, so I'm not prepared to prescribe a specific amount of vacation that people should enjoy. Instead, I want to use the remainder of this article to encourage us to use our time away from work as a time of spiritual encouragement, not a time of spiritual famine.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT REST?

The Bible does not explicitly address how Christians should think about vacation time, but it does speak very clearly about rest. In the very beginning, in Genesis 2:2, we see that "God finished his work that he had done,

and he rested on the seventh day from all his work." In Exodus 20, we see that keeping the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus rested. In Matthew 8, when the disciples are panic-stricken about the waves of a tempest coming over the side of their boat, they go to Jesus and find him asleep, resting. In addition to the divine models that we see in both the creation account and in the life of Jesus, our human limitations require that we rest and sleep. Our bodies are temporary and will one day pass away—this is an excellent reminder that we are not God. As Psalm 121:4 says, "Behold, he [God] who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." Thankfully, Scripture is clear: not only do our bodies need physical rest but we have also been given commands to follow the perfect example of Christ. The question is: what should that rest look like?

THE RISE OF THE MODERN-DAY VACATION

Since the Bible doesn't speak directly about vacations, it is reasonable to ask where the whole concept of taking a vacation came from. Before writing this article, I frankly hadn't given it much thought, but as we will see, Christians have been thinking about vacationing well for a long time. According to Merriam-Webster.com, the word vacation seems first to have been recorded in the 14th century in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as "vacacioun." The idea of "respite, or being free," as the Latin word "vocare" would translate, was primarily attributed to the social elite from the 14th century until the second half of the 19th century. In the United States, the Puritans in New England were very industrious and believed in working six days a week. They held work in high regard and looked down upon idleness. The Puritans may have been leaning on Proverbs 18:9 in forming this opinion, "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys." The context here is idleness. Let me be clear: idleness and rest are not the same thing. Idleness can lead to temptation; rest is restorative.

In 1869, William H. H. Murray, a preacher at Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, wrote articles and books about the serenity and beauty of the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. In his writing, Murray put forth the notion that time in nature was an excellent tonic for the physical ailments of life in the big cities of New England. Our European counterparts had long embraced the idea of vacation, as we have discussed, but the dawn of the industrial age in America and a growing middle class of workers combined to create the right time for Murray to become the "father of the outdoor movement." In addition to workers with modest disposable income, the industrial age also brought significant infrastructure

to the country. Trains could now carry folks to the shore, and hotels could be built where folks could stay for days at a time. Like their colleagues, Christians began to take advantage of their means and enjoy time away from work. Interestingly, for many the change of scenery was just what the doctor ordered (literally). Still, for others the time away from work presented temptations to sin that the Puritans had been so concerned about.

Moral middle-class citizens and believers within the church were looking for destinations that would prohibit smoking, drinking, and debauchery. What soon followed was the establishment and growth of religious camp meetings and conference assemblies. The camp meetings were primarily focused on conversion, while the assemblies were more focused on spiritual growth. The Chautauqua Conferences in New York concentrated uniquely on training and supporting Sunday School teachers. The influence of the Chautauqua Conference was felt as far South as Monteagle, Tennessee, where the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly (MSSA) still hosts families today.

WHAT SHOULD OUR VACATIONS LOOK LIKE TODAY?

In many instances, it is easier to define something by what it is not rather than what it is. Recognizing that everything we have is a gift from the Lord, specifically our money and our time, I want to think about this through the lens of stewardship. The Holman Bible Dictionary defines stewardship as “utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation.” So, to think about this through the lens of stewardship, we must consider how we use the resources of money and time related to vacationing for God’s glory.

HOW MUCH SHOULD SOMEONE SPEND ON VACATION?

The question of spending money applies to much more than just vacations. How much should someone spend on rent or a mortgage, a car, their clothes? People will spend an estimated \$7.7 trillion on vacations this year—essentially, \$1 out of every \$14 spent globally is spent on vacation. That seems like a lot! The Bible isn’t prescriptive here, but I think the words of Matthew 6:21 are helpful: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” These words serve as a wise warning for us not to make an idol out of our vacations. This underlying principle is far more important than establishing a formula for what someone should spend—this is a matter of the heart between you and the Lord. Many Christians I know

would prefer someone tell them an appropriate amount of money to spend. Well, I can’t do that, but I think there are a couple of questions you can ask yourself to gauge if a vacation is too expensive:

- *Is the cost of a vacation prohibiting you from giving generously to the church?*
- *Is your vacation spending preventing you from being generous and hospitable towards your neighbors and church family?*

If the answer to either question is yes, I’d encourage you to ask the Lord to reveal if you have placed too much financial emphasis on your vacations. God has given us financial resources to use for his glory, not our own. Supporting the local church with our giving is a means of grace that God has ordained and something we have committed to in our church covenant.

HOW MUCH VACATION TIME SHOULD I USE?

Time is one of our most precious resources. We cannot create more of it, and once we use it, we can never get it back. Ephesians 5 is a great encouragement to Christians to make “the best use of the time because the days are evil.” I believe Paul’s words here are helpful in light of our lens of stewardship. We need to recognize that our time is a gift from the Lord. Like other gifts from God, we need to steward our time well. Again, Scripture is not prescriptive on how much time we should take away from our jobs. While many factors influence our time off for vacation, the single most significant contributor is the nature of our work. For example, our brothers and sisters in the teaching profession generally have long periods off in the summer. People working in a retail environment may have hectic work periods around the holidays and may be restricted in when they can take time off. My job tends to be pretty flexible in the late spring and early summer but is quite busy in November and December. Regardless of when we have our vacation, we want to be faithful stewards of what we have. I’d suggest you consider the following question as you plan your time away: *Is my vacation time jeopardizing my commitments to my employer?* We have a responsibility to our employers to execute the work we have been given. If we abuse our vacation time, we are not only failing to be faithful employees, but we are also running afoul of Colossians 3:23.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH MY VACATION TIME?

Maybe the trickiest part of the vacation puzzle for you is what to *do* with your vacation time. Regardless of what you choose, our attitude toward our vacation should be to use the time for spiritual growth and not a break from our spiritual disciplines. I hope you will understand. I'm not advocating that you only use your vacation to read the Bible (although that should be your heart's desire whether you are on vacation or not). What I am suggesting is that you use the time to grow in your love for the Lord. If you like to spend your vacation time at the beach, use your trip as an opportunity to marvel at the beauty of the Lord's creation. Think about how, in his kindness, God created white sandy beaches in the Florida panhandle; he created a materially different beach on the Atlantic coast, and he even created black and red sand beaches in Hawaii! Maybe you prefer to hike in the cooler temps of the North Georgia mountains. Hiking can be a great time to reflect on God's faithfulness. Perhaps that would be a good time to remember the Lord rescuing his people from Egypt in the Exodus and how he has been faithful to you.

Do you struggle to plan your vacations? Take a short-term mission trip with Mount Vernon! Using your time away from work to visit a church partner in the Dominican Republic or some missionaries in the Middle East would be a fantastic way to grow closer to the Lord. I have led several short-term trips in the past. The feedback I've heard consistently is that the folks traveling were so encouraged by going. In taking a short-term mission trip, we encourage those serving in the field and get to see firsthand the work the Lord is doing in another context. If you have thought about joining in on a Mount Vernon trip but have never actually gone, I can't encourage you enough to take the plunge! Maybe traveling overseas isn't something you feel comfortable doing. Could you use your vacation time to visit or care for a family member? If you have unbelieving family members, using your time to see them could very well be a short-term mission trip!

Finally, use your time away as a chance to rest and recharge. Having fun on your vacation is important. If you are a married man reading this, I want to encourage you to keep in mind that we are talking about vacation and *not* relocation. That means planning and ensuring you haven't just moved your life to another venue. If you have children, give your wife a break from the non-stop job of being a mother. Use the time to create some fun family traditions like "donuts with dad" one morning so mom gets to sleep in (that doesn't have to be only for

vacation, by the way). Vacationing with another family is always an excellent way to have fun and build deeper relationships within the body of Christ. So, as you are gearing up for a summer vacation or planning something for the future, be intentional to make wise use of the time. If you will be gone on a Sunday, find a local church where you can visit. Remember, the whole point of our vacations is to rest from our work and not to take a vacation from our spiritual lives.

It is important to remember that spending time away from work and seeking rest apart from Christ is a fruitless exercise. We will continue to naturally long for the rest that satisfies our soul. We would be remiss not to use our time away to grow in grace and godliness. May we be a people marked by the pursuit of Christ until he returns or calls us home, where we will spend our days adoring and worshipping our King!

— Garry Hill

Work

Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation

Written by Daniel M. Doriani

For Christians striving to fulfill the second greatest commandment (Matt. 22:39), how many of us see our work as being God's primary means for how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves? And I don't just mean your office where you host a Bible study or share the gospel with your co-workers, though you should! No, I mean your actual job where your end product or service is an act of loving and serving others.

In *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation*, Daniel M. Doriani teaches that faithful disciples view all their work as sacred. From the Christian architect who designs a residential building and sees his work as loving the residents who will one day have a home in those apartments to the Christian medical researcher who views the technological advancement she is pursuing as loving the patient who will one day be treated with her medicine: God has given us skills and stations where we are to love and serve others through our work.

Compared to other books on this topic, I found Doriani's thoroughness especially helpful. He covers all aspects of work in this book, including chapters on the history of work, a Christian perspective on calling as it applies to our jobs, and resting from our work. This book would benefit those considering their calling as they begin their careers or are considering a career change.

While reading this book, I was encouraged that my work is a good gift from the Lord. He sees every square inch of my work as being under his authority, and my greatest responsibility at my job is faithfulness. As Doriani outlines, I pray our church would strive for justice, faithfulness, and love through the work the Lord has entrusted to each of us.

— Recommended by Jack Roberson



Excerpts from the Book

1

In fact, an act pleases the Lord when it meets three criteria: 1) The goal must be a desire to glorify God, 2) the standard must be God's law, and 3) the motive must be love for God and neighbor.

— "The Restoration of Work" p. 43

2

There is no universal right to improve one's lot by fleeing hard situations. A difficult marriage, job, family, or city is also God's assignment. A change of circumstances may not solve a problem. We should not desert God's assignment. We should seek contentment there.

— "Calling and Work" p. 92

3

The gospel heals or defangs work as a compulsive quest for worth and wealth.

— "Work, Rest, and the Rhythms of Life" p. 142

Wellness for the Glory of God

Living Well After 40 with Joy and Contentment in All of Life

Written by John Dunlop, MD

What is true wellness? Our culture tends to focus primarily on our physical and mental well-being. If we are physically fit and happy, we must be well. As Christians, we may add our spiritual health to the list. In the book *Wellness for the Glory of God*, author and physician John Dunlop expands on this perspective. Wellness is so much more than being active and free from major illnesses.

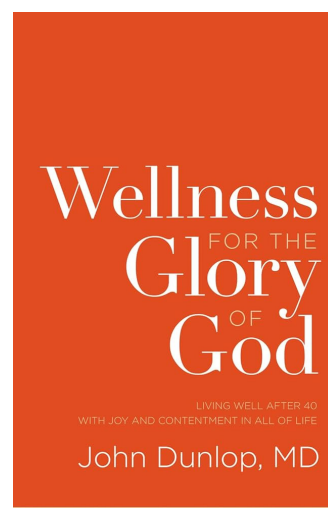
Wellness includes our entire being, which Dunlop breaks down into six distinct areas: physical, mental, social, financial, spiritual, and emotional. These components are all interrelated and affect each other both positively and negatively. When all these areas work harmoniously, within God's ordained purpose, one experiences true wellness, and as a result, the truly well person can live a life that honors God.

Drawing from the Bible and over 40 years of experience as a geriatrician, Dunlop explains the many facets of each component and how we can strive for wellness in each area. Every chapter ends with helpful questions for reflection and discussion to enable you to assess how you are doing and where improvements could be made.

Some particularly helpful insights from the book include how to recognize and care for a loved one who is developing dementia, stewarding finances in a manner that is trusting God, planning for the future, and living generously. Dunlop also spends significant time focusing on one's spiritual wellness because this is the one area that does not deteriorate with time. He states that, as physical and mental abilities decline, God uses this loss to deepen our dependence and relationship with God, and the church is the primary means where this occurs.

As we age, we have a growing awareness of our need to work on our health. Yet many of us strive with a myopic approach, putting most of our effort into one or two of the components of wellness. Any Christian approaching middle age or older would especially benefit from this biblically-based self-assessment of personal wellness. Dunlop does an excellent job of helping the reader strive for a more comprehensive approach to wellness while keeping us focused on the ultimate reason—bringing glory to our Lord and Savior.

— Recommended by Deana Menikoff



Excerpts from the Book

1

Statistically, our generation is likely to live longer than any generation since ancient times. God does not make mistakes. He is allowing this longevity for a definite reason. We need to find the purpose he has for our older years and pursue it with vigor.

– "Intro" p. 13

2

In the church, we give and receive practical help and are stretched by others whose life experiences have been totally different from our own. It is likely the best place for our spiritual growth.

– "Spiritual Wellness" p. 134

3

No matter how hard we try to be healthy in each domain of life, the reality is that in most of these areas, the wellness we have achieved will eventually be depleted. Our physical health or our mind may fail, we might lose much of our social support, or our finances will dwindle. The only area that need not fail is the satisfaction we receive from our relationship with God.

– "Emotional Wellness" p. 166

JULY

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

July 1	Isaiah 40	July 17	Matthew 25:1–13
July 2	Isaiah 36	July 18	1 Thessalonians 5:1–11
July 3	Isaiah 37	July 19	Exodus 12:1–13
July 4	Isaiah 38	July 20	Luke 12:1–34
July 5	Luke 2:41–3:6	July 21	Luke 12:35–59
July 6	Isaiah 39	July 22	Luke 13:1–9
July 7	Isaiah 40	July 23	Mark 4:1–20
July 8	John 17:24–26	July 24	John 15:1–8
July 9	2 Corinthians 5:1–10	July 25	James 2:14–26
July 10	Colossians 3:1–17	July 26	Psalm 7
July 11	1 John 4:7–21	July 27	Luke 12
July 12	Exodus 33:17–34:9	July 28	Luke 13:1–9
July 13	John 17:1–23		
July 14	John 17:24–26		*Sermons in bold
July 15	Luke 12:35–59		
July 16	Matthew 24:32–51		

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



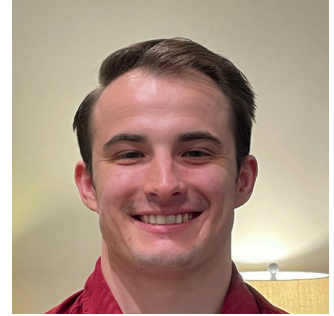
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**Laura
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**Anna
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**Blake
Pullen**



**Nathan
Schuh**



**Alex
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**Zach
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MOUNT VERNON

BAPTIST CHURCH