

Don't Allow Your Rest to Be Your Undoing

As a native Floridian, I know the value of summer relaxation, especially as I am now living in New England. It's only natural that many churchgoers wouldn't wish to waste the sunshine.

So this summer, like so many summers past, pews will be abandoned for the sandy beach. The question I've prayerfully considered is, "Is it wrong to skip church in exchange for the BBQ or beach for vacation?"

The knee-jerk response would be to quote Hebrews 10:25, and unilaterally tell everyone to not "forsake gathering together." That wouldn't necessarily be wrong, but I believe a better response is, "Not necessarily."

Our commitment to Jesus transcends church attendance, and that commitment follows us even when we are away. The danger is in the extended absences. The forsaking of the body can at times be a gradual drift. If we are not watchful, our relaxation and rest could lead to our undoing.

I used to be quite a fan of MMA (Mixed Martial Arts). When I would watch a match on TV, my adrenaline would pump and my senses would heighten. I would become almost hyper-aware of my surroundings with an energy and vigor that normally evaded me.

I recall on one occasion, while my heart still was racing from the excitement of a match, I shifted into my kitchen to quickly pour myself a glass of soda. As I poured it, my eyes were still glued to the TV, and in my distraction, the cup slipped through my hands mid-pour. However, due to the adrenaline and excitement, I somehow managed to snatch the glass out of the air, with almost superhuman-like abilities, and resume the pour without skipping a beat. I came screaming

out of the kitchen, "Did you see what just happened?" to a rather unimpressed audience.

Only I knew what actually happened, and how the excitement and energy from the evening had put me in a mode of hyper-awareness. In other words, had I been more comfortable and relaxed, involved in some less energetic activity, I am not sure I could have performed that feat. No doubt, the glass would have shattered.

The important lesson is, our activities and environment have a resonating effect and influence on the proverbial glass-drop moments in our life, particularly in a spiritual sense. The excitement of MMA that particular evening caused me to be perceptive and responsive in a manner that was out of the ordinary. Similarly, when we distance ourselves from church and fellowship, our spiritual perception, discernment and senses will dull leaving us unprepared and vulnerable, and we may find ourselves dealing with shattered glasses.

Scripture says: "... be prepared in season and out of season..." (2 Timothy 4:2)

Again we are told in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

The enemy looks for the vulnerable. The question we should ask is, "How do we become vulnerable?" The answer might surprise you. It's not through temptation, bad company or someone cutting you off in traffic. The reality is, it is often through comfort.

We become comfortable. We become complacent. We become prey.

This is where the *spirit of derailment* functions. What is the *spirit of derailment*? The *spirit of derailment* is not necessarily a personified, malevolent entity in as much as it is a condition. Jesus was even referred to as a stumbling

block, or a 'de-railer' (in our modern language). But this isn't on account of Jesus, but rather on account of the condition of the hardened heart. Derailment is a condition of the complacent.

Proverbs 18:7, like so many other verses, demonstrates that "the fool brings ruin upon himself." I have often said, "I do not need the devil's help to do bad, I can do it perfectly well on my own."

What most Christians do not consider is how capable they are of self-sabotage, being derailed or tripped up. How many of us have been on vacation, and failed to maintain a godly witness? With tears and regret, many have told me of their missteps at the moment least expected.

Certainly, we can vacation without foregoing comfort, but physical rest should not lessen spiritual engagement. Do not allow the summer comforts to open us up to complacency and make us vulnerable to the enemy.

May this be a loving, gentle reminder for us to keep watch! Be ready. Stay ready!

Being away from church does not mean backsliding and should not cause us to become prey. Our vacation shouldn't lead to a spiritual crisis. Being away from church should simply mean, "I'll be back in a week or two."

So how do we maintain our walk when we are not physically present in church? The key is to keep Christ in our hearts as well as our community and commitments. Let Him be present with us. Consider the apostle Paul during his many travels. His fellow believers remained close to his heart even when there was distance. We know this, because of the many letters he wrote.

We can remain faithfully engaged in our church community in our absence by sending texts to others, dropping encouragement

on social media or being old-fashioned and giving someone a call.

It is understandable that vacation can be a time to disconnect and detach a bit, but the church remains the body of Jesus Christ. If my arm or leg needed to detach to get some rest, I would be in some serious trouble.

In our absence, church is still occurring, supporting missions, outreaches and producing ministry. Perhaps while vacationing we may forget to give tithes and offerings. Giving is a powerful way to remain faithful. Give through a web-portal, or take a moment to call it in. When we partner in prayer, intercession and giving, we remain a vital part of the ministry of our churches.

Most importantly, do not take time away from prayer and the reading of God's Word. Keep Jesus the priority. There should never be an occasion when we take time away from being with Jesus.

Be blessed, refreshed and encouraged as you vacation, but remember, keep watch, be ready, stay ready! Do not allow your rest to derail you.

Aaron Rios is a musician, author and pastor who serves on the Northshore of Beverly, Massachusetts, outside of Boston, who has a contagious passion for encouraging, equipping and inspiring believers to pursue their kingdom destiny for the cause of Christ.