

for REFLECTION

Vacation: Reconnecting with Family, Friends, God, and Nature

by Marcellino D'Ambrosio

Work is a four-letter word, true. But is it not a curse word. As the jobless know all too well, gainful employment is a blessing. Work is an important means to an even more important end: life.

But unending work becomes a curse, leading to drudgery, even slavery. Dickens's character Ebenezer Scrooge is an example of a person whose glum existence is nothing but work. Scrooge totally loses all perspective in his obsession. Work for him becomes an end in itself.

Work takes up a majority of the waking hours of most people. But the workday must be punctuated with a few minutes of diversion, fellowship, and laughter from time to time. We call this recreation.

The work year must also be punctuated with longer pauses for recreation. Some of these pauses are holidays, often celebrated at home.

But another annual pause usually entails getting away from work and home for an extended time. This we call vacation.

A vacation, like a retreat, is bound up with the idea of getting away from normal, everyday life. It is all about a total change of scenery and routine. The point is to reconnect—with family, with friends, with God, and with nature.

New places, people and experiences mean renewal, re-creation, restoration of a proper perspective where God is first, others are second, and I am third.

The new experiences of a vacation can generate new insights, new ideas, even new solutions for problems at home, church, or at work.

When we continuously spin our wheels at work and in the normal routine of life, we often dig ruts that get so deep that they bog us down and block our view. Plodding along, we stagnate in a stressful and unproductive monotony.

Vacation has the potential to re-ignite both creativity and productivity. And “getting away from it all” can often lead to renewed appreciation of “it all”: family, the hometown, and work.

Vacation planning, however, often runs into obstacles, such as lack of funds. So one approach to a more affordable vacation is a “stay-cation” where people remain at home during their week or two off work.

But beware. If this time is used just to get projects done around the house, it is no stay-cation! It will neither refresh nor restore a person's vision.

If staying home is the only option, get creative about planning a series of day trips that provide the new experiences that are an essential part of a vacation.

A college buddy and I once ended our summer jobs in mid-August with only a couple of weeks left before having to return to school. We desperately needed a vacation but only had \$35 each to spend. Undeterred, we borrowed bicycles, strapped a tent and sleeping bags on our backs, and began pedaling into the woods, expecting to catch our dinner in wilderness streams. It turned out to be one of the greatest adventures of our lives.



Another problem for some can be the lack of companionship. There was a summer in my single years when none of my friends had time off when I did. I reluctantly tried a solo vacation with God, C.S. Lewis fiction, and the summertime beauty of coastal New England to keep me company. It was amazingly energizing!

Of course, we usually go on vacation with close friends or family. And this does entail some kind of a financial investment.

Is it worth it?

If the immediate benefits of stress relief and refreshment are not enough to make you answer in the affirmative, consider that the payoff of such a vacation goes far beyond short-term renewal of vision and enthusiasm.

Family vacations create shared memories, stories and images that strengthen the bonds of love and bring delight for years to come. Sometimes even vacation mishaps—when plans fail, tires go flat, and flights are cancelled—bring chuckles long into the future when they are retold year after year around the family dinner table.

Keep in mind that for a Christian, natural blessings such as vacations are transformed and elevated by faith. A vacation away from home never means a vacation from prayer and Christian morality as well. “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” stands for an approach to vacation that we frankly have to reject.

Even for the unbeliever, sin is never refreshing. It eventually leads to sadness, weariness, and boredom.

The Christian celebrates and enjoys the blessings of God’s creation on vacation, but all is sanctified by prayer and thanksgiving.

While a vacation is not exactly the same thing as a retreat, vacation for a Christian should always mean not only rest and relaxation but a renewal of our relationship with God and a restored sense of vocation.

Some would protest that going away on vacation is a luxury. It is a want, they say, not a need.

While vacation may not be necessary to survive, I maintain that it is necessary—to thrive.

D’Ambrosio writes from Texas.