

TIME



AWAY

IT WAS ALONGSIDE THE HOSPITAL BED of an ailing loved one that the extraordinary statements were made. The speaker was a relatively young pastor of a small-town church in the Midwest, come to offer his best to the one lying in the bed, one of his venerable parishioners. During the course of the bedside conversation the pastor mentioned that he was about to leave for his vacation, to sit on a porch and read mystery novels, to “take a vacation from God.” When asked how one does such a thing—how one *does* take a vacation from God—the pastor replied, “I don’t know, but I’m gonna try.”

It seems rather odd that in His word God speaks of His relationship with earth-bound people in affectionate, even intimate terms, yet many of those same people look for ways to keep Him at arm’s length. God speaks to us as a loving Father who cares deeply about our lives, yet many Christians want so little of Him. But the Christian living at arm’s length from the Father is as unnatural as the unbeliever seeking to know Him better.

People often use a vacation to break away from the steady, unrelenting rigors of their occupation—something to break the monotony, or bring physical or mental relief. People sometimes need a break from troublesome people, but God is not troublesome. He is not a weight upon our shoulders. He is not someone who drags us down, but someone who lifts us up.

Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself...

Matthew 14:13a

When the Lord Jesus “went on vacation,” He ran *to* God the Father, not away from Him. Part of the burden for Christ in taking on the flesh of His brethren was that from time to time He, like anyone else, would need to take a break from the demands of His work. More than that, His deep soul was touched by the sorrow around Him—as well as the price some were paying by being associated with His ministry. One such time was when Jesus received word that His cousin John had been beheaded by Herod, but even then the crowds still pressed in on Him.

...and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

Matthew 14:13b-14

By the end of that day, which included the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the physical and emotional demands on Jesus had surely left Him exhausted. After comforting others, He now needed to be comforted Himself. After healing others, He needed His broken heart healed. After flowing so much life-giving energy into others, He now needed to have some of His own energy restored. So for a few

hours Jesus took a break from the physical and emotional demands of ministry—and the break He needed was time spent with the Father.

My guess is that the pastor who spoke of seeking a “vacation from God” was simply expressing in a clumsy way his mental and physical weariness of ministry. Perhaps.

The truth is, when our bodies need rest from the demands of daily life; when our minds need clearing from the details and minutia of our jobs; when our hearts are breaking, and we need solace and healing, we will have all of these needs met in the *presence*, not the absence, of our heavenly Father.

After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

Matthew 14:23