

Jesus goes to the Lake
Jesus plays on a Team
Jesus takes a Vacation

At Emmaus, we want to live OUT (On Mission), where we live, learn, work, and PLAY.

4 Common Phrases...and Some Replies

1. “But...I worship God best in nature.”

- a. Yes, it’s great to worship God in nature, whether with others or while alone!
- b. But hiking with friends or fishing alone (both of which are good gifts) is not the same as gathering with the church.
 - i. Hebrews 10:24-25 (see Suggestion #1 below)
 - ii. Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Corinthians 14; Colossians 3; James 2; Hebrews 13
- c. Think: “Both, and” // Not: “Either, or”
- d. Be careful about comparing the “fun” of nature/vacation/competition to church.
 - i. This is very much an “apples-to-oranges” comparison.
 - ii. Gathered worship in a local church family isn’t supposed to be the same as a vacation in nature or a sports competition.
 - iii. *Church propels us into nature and into the world*; it doesn’t prevent us from enjoying these things.
 - iv. *Church gives us the foundation and framework to engage the world*; it’s not in competition with these other activities.

2. “But...church is more than a building.”

- a. Of course. No one is arguing that “church” is confined to a particular building, time, or method of gathering (and if they are arguing this, it’s not helpful).
- b. At the same time, though, being part of the church means gathering with brothers and sisters in Christ for regular worship and ministry.
- c. The New Testament letters overwhelmingly focus on life within the context of worship, fellowship, and mission.
 - i. These things happen both inside and outside of a particular gathering place (building), but they certainly include what happens when we gather.
 - ii. The Gathering (and the building in which it happens) should propel us into the world to live each moment as an act of worship to God.
- d. Time in nature, going on a vacation, or participating on a sports team can all be part of the Christian life, but they don’t replace regularly gathering with a church family.

3. “But...we’ll only have these opportunities with the kids for a short time.”

- a. Yes, that’s true...but just as you want sports and family trips to teach certain lessons, they also teach priorities (and reinforce lessons you might not mean to be teaching).
- b. Kids pick up on our priorities. How we speak about gathering with the church for worship will impact (to a large degree) how they think about church.
- c. And, as soon as your child is finished with sports or grows up, there will be hundreds of other things to fill their time other than connection with a local church family.

- d. It's great they can play on sports teams and go on trips, but don't lose an eternal, Kingdom perspective.
 - i. Make sure they know Jesus is Lord of every part of life and every season of life.
 - ii. *Jesus isn't one priority among many others; Jesus sets the priorities for our lives.*

4. "But...we've worked hard to retire and go on vacations."

- a. The empty-nest season of life and the flexibility of retirement can be wonderful blessings that we receive with thankfulness as a gift from God. We want to cultivate joy, not shame.
- b. And, just like sports teams and vacations, these new seasons of life can quickly take us away from connection with a church family and gathered worship.
- c. Retirement is a great gift, but it's not a theological theme in the Bible. In Scripture, we are called to finish strong with faith and ministry. (Phil 3:13; Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:6)
- d. In retirement, continue to invest your time and resources for Kingdom impact.
 - i. Connect with a local church whenever and wherever you travel.
 - ii. Even though it might be tempting to pull away from local church worship and ministry, I pray you'll engage like never before.
 - iii. Encourage young families. Serve your Sunday School class. Go on a mission trip.
 - iv. Make plans so your financial resources will have a Kingdom impact beyond this life.

4 Humble Suggestions

1. Embrace Hebrews 10:24-25 as a gift, not a burden.

- a. *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24-25)*
- b. Being a Christian is certainly more than gathering, but it's not less.
- c. When you're away (for travel or sports)...
 - i. Stay connected to your local church through podcasts or streaming
 - ii. Connect with other churches where you travel (online, or better yet, on location)
- d. If you miss a Sunday morning service because of travel...
 - i. Attend your home church on Wednesdays or Sunday evenings
 - ii. Connect with a Bible study group at another time during the week
- e. Guard your heart and mind against bitterness, cynicism, and apathy.
 - i. Be on guard if you start to get defensive when someone says they haven't seen you in a while at church.
 - 1. We need friends who care and will keep us accountable.
 - 2. If you don't have anyone checking on you, that should be a red flag.
 - ii. Be on guard if you start to be unbothered by not gathering with your church family or you find yourself feeling bitter or cynical toward church.

2. Operate from Grace and Gratefulness, not guilt

- a. *For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (2 Tim 4:4-5)*
- b. *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*
- c. Be grateful for the opportunity to get away. Enjoy, rest, refocus.
- d. Take time for Family Worship
 - i. Pray and Read Scripture with your family.
 - ii. Share testimonies of God’s salvation and faithfulness in your family.
 - iii. Talk about questions family members are dealing with in life and Scripture.

3. Gathering with the Church drives us to Go on Mission

- a. *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:3-6)*
- b. On vacation and on your sports teams, pray this prayer:

“God, open a door, open my eyes, and open my mouth.”

 - i. Remember - we want to proclaim AND display Jesus.
 - ii. How you speak and how you live are opportunities to make a Kingdom impact.
- c. Caution - Your desire to be “on mission” can quickly become an excuse for avoiding church. We might even be tempted to pursue *more* trips and teams, when no actual mission work is happening.
 - i. Be intentional and prayerful! Don’t let missions become a cover for selfishness.
 - ii. Whether we’re talking about full-time, international missionaries or a kid being a missionary on their ball team, *“missions” in the New Testament flows out of the local church.* You can’t be fully on mission if you’re disconnected from the local church as a place of worship and discipleship.

4. Set Limits

- a. *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*
- b. When it comes to vacations, sports teams, and time away from church, one of the easiest and wisest steps is simply to set limits.
 - i. Determine ahead of time how many days/weeks you’ll be away.
 - ii. If we aren’t intentional with our schedule and money, someone else will make the decisions for us (and they probably won’t make Kingdom-minded, church-prioritized decisions).
- c. For our kids’ teams, we don’t have to be the victims of someone else’s schedule. We have the ability simply to say No. The act of setting limits is part of spiritual wisdom and faith.
- d. Life is lived in seasons. A “season” of time at the lake or on the team should include anticipation of regathering with (and serving) your church family.
- e. Remember this motto = “We will live with **Eternal Focus and Daily Faithfulness.**”