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CHRISTMAS BREAK TIPS

BY PETE AVERY

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

When you go home for Christmas Break it seems like all of the spiritual growth and personal maturity you've sustained during the semester disappears; it's like you're back in High School.

In this article, Pete Avery has compiled insights from others as well as wisdom learned from personal experience, on how to spiritually survive the longest break of the school year. What's particularly helpful is the focus on attitude, heart, and relational issues. This is about living Christ-centered in a habitually me-centered environment.



Pete's Guide to a Great Break

For some of you, Christmas break comes as a breath of fresh air. After a grueling finals week and your first few months living on your own, you get back home to the smell of warm cookies and Christmas trees, have someone else cooking for you, and start to enjoy what might be your favorite time of year.

For others, however, this is a tough time. When I was in college, going home made me remember how much I really enjoyed being at college. I had grown used to the freedom, my parents seemed to think I was still 14 years old, family conflict exploded, and, of course, there were plenty of chores and projects that were saved for my arrival.

Whatever situation you find yourself in, one thing seems to remain constant in my experiences talking with college students after breaks: it's a tough time to continue following Jesus well. When you get home, all that growth you experienced in your relationship with God begins to feel like it's disappeared. You feel lonely and miss the friends that you've made. Your Bible seems to be too heavy to pick up. You find yourself burning countless hours staring mindlessly at a screen. What can be done about this?

I think there's plenty that can be done. Over the years, I've picked up some ideas and helpful pointers both from others and from personal experience that I thought you all might find helpful as we're starting the longest break of the year.

The Break Destroyers

Before I actually give my advice on making the most of your break, I want to let you know a couple things that I think we default to on our own that have the potential to ruin your break the most. They are:

1. *A self-oriented heart*

The biggest thing that holds students back from enjoying their break is being too concerned with enjoying your break. It's really easy to think that this is just your time to get some rest and gear up for next semester. Christmas *break* after all, right? I'd like to push against that. Your life isn't primarily about you. Really. I know that as kids you were told the opposite by Sesame Street and Barney, but if you've trusted Christ and are following Him with your life, then your life is about Him and about others, and the things that you do with your life are done to bring Him glory (which, I would argue, actually makes you happier as a result, but I digress).

If you're the only person you think about, you're going to waste the most flexible time of your year.

Even if you work a full-time job over the break like I did, you have a lot more time to think about others at home than you do at school. How can you be a blessing to others? What might your friends need? If you think you'd appreciate something (like a phone call from a buddy), chances are your friends would too. I want to encourage you to be the one who makes it happen and takes the initiative.

2. *An entitled attitude*

I deserve this break. I just need some time to relax. Geez, Mom, how can you be so selfish that you'd wake me up at 9 am? These are the kind of thoughts an entitled person thinks. And, incidentally, those are things I said to my parents on breaks in college. Don't think you're entitled? Think again. It's in the water we drink. **Men and women, we are the most entitled generation to ever walk the face of the earth.** I'd encourage you to ask the Lord to put this to death, and then to take steps against it.

Your parents wake you up because they want you to have healthy sleep patterns and they care about you. Is it a bit overbearing? Maybe, but that's not the point. When you get upset with parents for asking things of you, you're telling them that they don't understand what you deserve (which of course we believe is to do whatever you think is best without anyone else telling you otherwise). I'm convinced your break (and your life in general after the break too!) would go a lot smoother and end up being a lot more enjoyable if we repent of what we think we deserve.

3. Considering “relationship with Jesus” to be “reading the Bible and praying”

Don't laugh – 90% of the time that I ask someone how his relationship with God is going, I get an evaluation of how many quiet times he's having and how many minutes long they go. But, I've known a number of jerks who do not walk well with Jesus who read the Bible and prayed every day with great devotion. And I've known a lot of people who struggle to spend consistent time in the Bible who love Jesus greatly and follow him really well.

So Pete doesn't want me to read the Bible? That couldn't be further from the truth. If you are serious about following Christ, you love his Word and love digging into it as often as you can. I'm just saying that I don't want you to feel ashamed and guilty and like you failed your Savior if you didn't read the Bible this morning. That, and I don't want you feel really good about yourself and like all is well if you did. Following Jesus is a lot *more* than spending time in the Bible, and that's why these tips address what they do.

Tips for a Better Break

I'm calling these “tips” because they are just that: tips. They're helpful pointers gleaned from experience and the wisdom of others. They're not a rulebook or a checklist that guarantees a good break. This isn't five steps to happiness. That said, if you take these seriously, I do think that, generally speaking, your break will be a lot more enjoyable than it otherwise could be.

1. Don't bail on your friends.

It's amazing how hard this one can be. Keeping in touch with some of your favorite people can feel really difficult. Your friends most likely feel just as lonely as you do. After a few months at college, your parents are going to treat you just like they did before you left. It's not their fault – they haven't been here to see what God has done in your life. However, it does make it easy to feel lonely and like no one understands you. That's ok.

For one thing, Jesus does. He hasn't moved to a different city for the next month. He's with you walking through whatever your break brings. But, so is a good Christian friend. Pick up the phone and call. It's the closest thing to a face-to-face conversation you might be able to get. I was a freshman in college when Facebook launched, so I'm not just an old fogie who doesn't understand it, but I can tell you for sure – Facebook chat isn't the same. If you want to really connect with your friends, call them. And no, texting isn't a phone call either. ☺

Or, better yet, go see them! Some of you live in the same city or near where your friends live. **Borrow a car from your parents and go grab coffee or hot cocoa with a Cru friend and talk. Community is refreshing because we were built for it. Confess sin, pray for one another, ask for advice – make good use of this time!**

Schedule a regular weekly or twice-weekly “talk date” with some friends and you'll have a lot easier time loving your family well, walking with Jesus personally, and enjoying the blessings the break brings.

2. Serve your family.

I've only been married for five and a half years, and I can already tell you: your mom's language of love is her children washing the dishes for her. When my wife walks around the corner to see a clean kitchen, suddenly the world is all right. There could be bombs dropping outside, but she's in heaven.

A lot of the time we feel bored and think there's nothing to do just because we're only thinking about ourselves and our desires. Step back and ask yourself what would really bless your parents. Then go do those things. Or better yet, go ask your parents how you could help them and be a blessing to them!

I can tell you from experience: my dad doesn't know Jesus, but when I served him and helped him around the house (mind you, without complaining about it and letting him know how lucky he is to have a son like me), everything went better.

3. *Make good use of your time.*

For some, breaks seem to fly by. For me, it felt like an eternity and I couldn't wait to get back to college. Regardless of how it feels, you actually all have the same 24 hours in a day for a few weeks. Different things work for different kinds of people, but making yourself a schedule, or even just a list of goals and things to do, will go a long way.

Whatever you do, don't "wing it" and expect to have a good break. Proverbs makes it clear that the wise person is one who plans and then works, trusting the results to God. Plan out what you hope to study in the Bible, the things you'd like to do around the house to help, the times you'd like to make phone calls to friends, etc. Set daily and weekly goals. Maybe even look ahead at class syllabi and get a head start on class reading 😊.

4. *Rest well.*

"I see what's going on. Pete just wants me to work my tail off the whole break!" Not exactly! **Real, good rest comes not just as a result of doing nothing or doing whatever your body or brain tells you to do, but because you are intentionally taking a period of rest and you know you can.** Good rest comes when you've prepared for it, and intentionally take it.

Tell your parents that you'd like to take Sunday or Saturday (or some other part of any day for that matter!) as a day to rest. Then, the day or two before you want to take your rest day, ask them if there's some things they'd like you to help with over the next couple days that you could do now so can take that day off.

Then rest well. Take some extended time alone with the Lord – go to your favorite coffee shop or restaurant by yourself or with a friend or two from home or from Cru. Enjoy the time, knowing you've scheduled it and that the Lord is actually quite ok with this. Go out to a movie, read a book, whatever. Enjoy the time, knowing you've served your family and considered others well.

Just a pointer: you'll probably get snarky responses from parents if you've spent 5 hours a day on tech gadgets and then tell them you're taking a day to rest. You feel a lot less lazy for spending 5 hours on a smartphone when you're on your rest day, too.

5. *Read a book*

If you're looking for a great way to use some time to engage your mind, rest, and enrich your relationship with God, then read a good Christian book. If you don't know what to read, check out one of these excellent, short, break-friendly books:

Just Do Something: A liberating approach to finding God's will by Kevin DeYoung

The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith by Timothy Keller

Humility: True Greatness by C. J. Mahaney

The Knowledge of the Holy by A. W. Tozer (the characteristics of God and their meaning for Christians)

Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ by John Piper

Have a Merry Christmas, and I look forward to seeing many of you at IndyCC!

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