

A Parent's Guide to
**SPRING
BREAK**

axis

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What's the Deal with Spring Break?

Spring break is often the first opportunity of the year for families to vacation together. However, it's also the first opportunity of the year for college students to escape their campuses, relieving their cabin fever from the long winter months and shaking off the stress of the first stint of classes. This month, [hundreds of thousands](#) of college students (and let's face it, high school students, too) will crowd some of the most popular beaches in what is now popularly described as “the spring break phenomenon.” The stereotypical college student spring break scene can only be described as an orgy—with an exhilarating and erotic nightlife and daytime debauchery. The music blares, the alcohol flows, the wet t-shirt contests ensue, and perhaps nowhere else can the nature of hook-up culture be witnessed so explicitly. The ethos of spring break is that anything goes, you can do whatever you want, and there are no consequences—go wild, get crazy. Alcohol dissolves any lingering inhibitions, and students give themselves up to the spring break experience, fully inhabiting the stereotype, which is often considered a rite of passage in the larger college experience.

Why is spring break important?

First of all, it's important to note that not all students travel for spring break, and, of those who do, not all end up at one of the most popular destinations, participating in the orgy that now characterizes spring break. However, regardless of where students end up and whether or not they participate in such behavior, this kind of experience is still held out to them by their peers and especially by pop culture as an acceptable and expected rite. More than that, spring break as an ideal defines for students of all ages what it means to be young, what it means to be free, and how to relate to the opposite sex. And this phenomenon is indicative of what has become normative in everyday life in our culture. We are living in a hook-up culture, and spring break is just one prime example of that.

Spring break is an outlet for the urges that students may already be struggling with and the pressure they may already be struggling under pre-college (though perhaps these struggles and pressures are amplified in college). The normalization of spring break-type behavior is at the heart of pop culture. Discipleship in this area needs to happen now—before students start their freshman year of college, suddenly navigating new independence.

Spring break is not just about one wild jaunt for college students in March. It's representative of what's going on in our culture at large and in regards to the younger generation specifically. As we will see, an exploration of this phenomenon includes an examination of peer pressure, cultural indoctrination, the normalization of party culture, and the subversion of the biblical concepts of fun, rest, and holy time.

It wasn't always this bad, was it?

According to Gabrielle Moss in [this Bustle article](#), “College students have almost always had time off from school in the early spring, though for a long time, students just headed home to celebrate Easter with their families and, in many cases, work at family farms and businesses.” So how did spring break become the carnival it is today? According to [this Time article](#), it started innocently when a man named Sam Ingram, the coach of Colgate University's swim team, was looking for a warm place to keep his swimmers in shape during spring break of 1936. He took them to Fort Lauderdale to train, and soon more swimming instructors followed Ingram's example. In 1938 the city hosted its first College Coaches' Swim Forum with more than 300 swimmers competing.

The swimmers were soon joined by wealthy Ivy Leaguers, who normally partied in Bermuda over spring break but opted for Fort Lauderdale during WWII after being “spooked by rumors of German U-Boats roaming the Caribbean,” according to [this Atlantic article](#).

By 1958, students were migrating to Florida for spring break in droves—a staggering [20,000 overran the beaches that year](#). Glen Swarthout, a Michigan State University English professor, was curious about what was going on, so he followed his students to Florida. He then wrote a novel about what he had witnessed there. [According to The New York Times](#), “In a nod to the Easter season, he called his book Unholy Spring, but Hollywood executives persuaded him to change the title to Where the Boys Are. The result was a blockbuster book that was spun off into a movie” in 1961. The film was not just a hit; it set a precedent. [Moss explains](#), “In the year following the release of the film, 50,000 students showed up for spring break in Fort Lauderdale, making it the epicenter of collegiate spring partying. Spring break exploitation films also became a part of the culture.”

The sexual revolution of the '60s had its impact, and by the '70s the spring break scene [had become much more lascivious](#), having reinterpreted the sexual mores of the previous decade for the younger generation. The spring break scene also spread to

cities beyond Florida.

[According to Moss](#), spring break grew as both a real-world rite and a pop-culture phenomenon, with 370,000 students invading the beaches of Fort Lauderdale in 1985 and with a slew of spring-break-themed movies releasing over the course of that decade, as well as MTV's first spring break broadcast from Daytona Beach in 1986. Of MTV's impact, [Moss writes](#), "MTV became a major force of spring break culture, bringing the idea that spring break was a lawless zone where nothing counted and everything was permitted into millions of homes across the country."

By 1987, spring break reached its absolute zenith (or nadir, depending on your point of view) with Joe Francis' video series, *Girls Gone Wild*, which showed footage of drunk young women flashing the mobs for as little as a free t-shirt, [according to Moss](#), who also summarizes: "Francis became a multimillionaire off the series, which had ubiquitous ads on late night TV in the '90s, and arguably created the reality porn genre that later led to such artistic achievements as the Kim Kardashian-Ray J sex tape. Francis exploited young women for profit until 2003, when he was arrested for tax evasion."

Despite a dip in spring break attendance in the early 2000s due to the economic recession, by 2013, [40% of college students](#) traveled for spring break, spending nearly \$1 billion in Florida and Texas alone. In fact, [500,000 spring breakers spent over \\$140 million just in Panama City](#).

There has never been much overt support for the spring break phenomenon from universities and the cities that host their revelries. The crime that accompanies the spring break scene has frustrated the local authorities, to say the least. [According to Frank McKeithen](#), the Sheriff of Panama City Beach, their problem is not just the spring-breakers but also the people who come to feed off them. In 2015, the Panama City Beach authorities recovered video footage (and not the first of its kind) of an incapacitated young woman being gang raped in the midst of the crowd in broad daylight with none of the nearby partiers intervening (the perpetrators were later apprehended and convicted). After the 2015 gang rape, the Panama City Beach authorities cracked down on the spring break scene, and, as a result, [many students have vacated Panama City Beach](#) as their spring break cesspool of choice. However, overall, the spring break phenomenon continues.

Where does spring break happen?

The most popular destinations for the stereotypical spring break experience include

beaches in Mexico, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean, and (stateside-wise) California, Texas, Alabama, South Carolina, Arizona, and Las Vegas. (Though not as popular, [there are companies](#) that have begun bringing the “party” mentality to the ski slopes through their deeply discounted spring break trips for college students.) Florida, however, outstrips all the other locations, having a total of five cities in the top fifteen popular destinations list: Miami, Daytona Beach, Fort Myers, Panama City Beach, and Cocoa Beach. Panama City Beach is still, as yet, considered [the spring break capital of the world](#), with the largest crowd congregating [behind the Spinnaker Beach Club](#).

What happens on spring break?

Though things like dancing, contests, beach parties, swimming, and eating do happen at spring break destinations, the majority of the activities center around and encourage two main activities: substance use and sex.

Substance Use

The spring break scene is made especially volatile by the excessive consumption of intoxicating substances and specifically alcohol, which, of course, impairs judgment and abates inhibitions. Sadly, culture tends to at least turn a blind eye on—if not outright encourage—heavy drinking during the college years, usually with the caveat that “[everyone’s doing it](#)” or that it’s part of growing up. In addition, [peer pressure often serves as the catalyst](#) for binge drinking (though the predisposition may already be there because [pop culture normalizes](#) this extreme behavior, too), [which can then lead to assault and sexual assault](#). Too often students end up spending time and money on a dangerous spring break experience they may not even be able to remember.

However, [according to Dr. Eric Collins](#), a psychiatrist who specializes in treating addiction, “Good parenting can make a difference in imparting the importance of drinking responsibly and moderately. Setting clear expectations and having a discussion about the consequences of poor choices regarding alcohol use is essential.” Regardless of the stance your family (or church) takes on alcohol, it’s an important topic to explore with your student for their own safety should they be exposed to and even experiment with it in college, perhaps without your permission or even knowledge. ***Your early, loving guidance can preempt poor choices and educate a naiveté that could be dangerous in a sudden situation.***

Sex

In a documentary released last year titled [Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution](#) (currently available on Netflix), filmmakers hit the spring break scene behind the

aforementioned Spinnaker, mingling with the crowd and interviewing students there. The footage they captured is heartbreaking. According to [this USA Today College article](#), a survey of last year's spring break reveals that "30% of respondents said they had '8 or more' drinks during the day while they were on spring break—with 32% saying they had 4-7 drinks a day. And 65% of respondents said they had at least one sexual partner. Of those who had spring break sex, 40% said they did not use any form of protection." But no number of statistics can have the impact of the disturbing footage *Liberated* exposes. The scene was overtly and vulgarly sexual, with many of these sexual acts—even intercourse, students claimed—engaged in publically and in broad daylight on the beach.

The great difference between the sexual revolution of now and that of the '60s is that, according to a perceptive student in the documentary named *Dakota*, while the sexual revolution of the '60s promoted free sex, sex was still intimate—still about the emotional connection between two people. Now, in a hook-up culture, according to Donna Freitas, author of [Sex and the Soul](#), "The predominant story about sex in college is, you know, we're casual about it [...] ambivalence is the best attitude to have about sex." *Dakota* agrees, "People will completely dismiss any emotions that go with sex because it's not supposed to matter anymore."

So, how do students divorce this intimate act from intimacy? Freitas further expounds, "You have to shut down emotionally in order to be [physically] intimate. You have to depersonalize the other person. Whether or not they're actually able to live that out, that's the message students are getting. They're working hard to have meaningless sexual encounters. Love's not a part of the college experience anymore." And in a hook-up culture, it's not just the men being sexually promiscuous, according to Dr. Robert Jenson, a professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Texas in Austin. He says women are "actively participating in it and essentially accepting those as the rules of the sexual game."

However, the spring break behavior is only a sample of a greater problem. In [this article](#), Benjamin Hickerson, assistant professor of recreation, park, and tourism management at Penn State, says, "The more you are part of the party atmosphere in the university, the more likely you are to engage in those behaviors during spring break. . . . You probably won't completely deviate from your campus behaviors, and those behaviors are a very good predictor of how you'll behave on spring break." The *Liberated* student, *Dakota*, likewise says, "It's not even the spring break mentality. It happens everywhere."

Why does it happen?

Students are living out what has become normative through pop culture. As Jensen says, “We’re in this grand experiment where images of explicit sexuality are now not just at the margins of the culture, but they’re at the heart of the culture.” One interviewed student explains, “[Kim Kardashian] became famous from a sex a tape. That’s what our generation’s built on.” Another student, Loden, says, “What we’ve seen on television and everything else... Sex is nothing anymore. Sex doesn’t mean anything. Sex is just a pleasure.” We *all* learn from pop culture, and pop culture most often portrays and encourages non-intimate sex.

In addition, both genders have a God-given sex drive and desire for connection—powerful human instincts and urges—that are exploited and corrupted by pop culture *for profit*. In the United States alone, [porn is a \\$12 billion industry](#). Sexually explicit images in which non-intimate, vulgar sexual behavior is presented as normal can be seen in advertising, music videos, TV shows, movies, etc. Sadly, sex sells.

Why Young Men Join In

As *Liberated* documents, being a man—the definition promoted by pop culture and widely accepted by students—is ultimately about being powerful, and women are the gauge. Women are seen as an opportunity for young men to express their power and gain respect. A “real” man has sex with a lot of women. Jensen explains, “In pop culture sex is seen as something that young men do to validate their own masculinity. It’s a vehicle for young men towards self-esteem.” It’s ultimately about bragging rights, according to Don McPherson, a former NFL quarterback, who says, “It’s a performance boys do for other boys. Girls become part of how boys prove their masculinity to each other.” And it stems from “insecurities and anxiety about not measuring up,” according to Sut Jhally, the founder and executive director of the Media Education Foundation.

Yet hooking up at a young age and with multiple partners is not something young men intuitively desire as much as it’s something they’re conditioned to believe *should* happen. More than anything, they’re pressured into this kind of behavior by the media they consume and their peers. Freitas explains that young men are “sometimes literally acting out according to these stereotypes or these expectations that we have in culture.”

Why Young Women Join In

Young women naturally want to feel desired and valued. Culture then persuades them that their sexuality is key to achieving value and being empowered. Beyoncé, Kim Kardashian, Cosmopolitan, and Victoria’s Secret (to name just a few influences) all promulgate the *same* definition of what it means to be a woman: essentially that “female sexuality is the key component to what it means to be female,” according to Jhally. Young women then compete with each other to be the most noticed and valued, which requires them to be the most sexual, which in turn requires them to do crazy

things they would not have done otherwise. Any positive reinforcement that translates into a boost in confidence perpetuates a vicious cycle. **Like men, they become slaves of the system, bound by self-destructive norms.**

What's the danger?

Ample footage in *Liberated* shows young men—sometimes more teasingly and other times less so but, either way, certainly without consent—sexually harassing and assaulting young women: untying and trying to pull off their bikinis and grabbing, groping, and slapping their body parts. Jensen says:

If men are socialized to be sexually aggressive, then it's not a very big leap from a consensual sexual activity to sexual coercion of varying degrees. . . . We're talking about a sexually coercive landscape in which men are socialized into taking sex from women. Women are socialized into capitulating to that as a part of a "normal" social scene, and the terrain on which sex then goes forward is extremely difficult and extremely dangerous, especially for young women. This is a culture in which sexual intrusion has become normalized.

Dr. Caroline Heldman, Research Director for the Geena Davis Institute for Gender in Media, says, "During spring break, sexual violence is absolutely the norm." *Liberated* footage coincides with this, showing young men manipulating and pressuring young women into sexual acts, persisting through their "no." Sometimes the young women yield in the end, rewarding the tactic and perpetuating the cycle. **Both genders are implicated in the problem, though the outcome is decidedly more dangerous for women.**

Liberated ends on the somber subject of the aforementioned 2015 Panama City Beach gang rape.

The lingering impression is that of bondage—that of students pressured, both by culture and their peers, into conforming to a stereotype, which leaves them emotionally wounded and profoundly broken. **Students are not free; they are living under the yoke of pressure.** Tony Port, co-founder of A Call to Men, says they are "held hostage by rigid norms."

What are the real issues? How do I respond?

It's ironic, to say the least, that spring break—stereotypically a period of debauchery and excess—happens during the season of Lent in the Christian year. Bobby Gross, author of [Living the Christian Year](#), explains that Lent is a season of sobriety, humility, and introspection as we “consider what it means to ‘deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him’” (232). Lent begins with a day of fast and culminates in Holy Week, which is perhaps the most solemn period and very heart of the Christian year. So how are we to reconcile a student's desire for fun, relaxation, letting loose, and forgetting the “real world” for a time with God's desire for us to live full, abundant, godly lives? What are the issues we need to talk about?

Holy Time

We often live for time off from work or school, i.e. the things we must do. We venerate the weekend, holidays, and vacations, and students cherish their breaks—fall break, Christmas break, spring break, summer break, etc. Perhaps this is just because we want to relax from the grind. Or perhaps it's because we have a human instinct to consecrate and celebrate time. Either way, although both can be corrupted in a broken world, both are God-ordained.

What God first made holy was not a *place* (that would come later), but *time*: the seventh day. “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (Gen. 2:3, NIV), and He later commanded His people, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8, NIV). It's clear: Certain time is set apart, and it is holy.

Beyond the seventh day/Sabbath, God further sacralized certain time by ordaining for Israel annual festivals imbued with spiritual significance, many of which became the bedrock for the holidays (etymologically *holy-day*) and holiday seasons later established by the church. The Christian calendar (aka the liturgical year) “entails a sequence of seven seasons built around the holy days that correspond to the major events in the life of Jesus” (Gross, 22). Observing the liturgical year facilitates Christians in inhabiting the still-unfolding story of God and following the life of Jesus. It's a way to locate our story within His, and it imbues time with spiritual significance—a means of commemoration, consecration, and celebration. The liturgical year, most basically, begins with Advent, then follows Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and ends with Pentecost. The non-festal time between Pentecost and Advent is known as “Ordinary Time.” All of these holidays (or “festivals”) and their seasons are about both remembrance and anticipation—remembering what God has done and anticipating what is to come.

Interestingly, the academic calendar and the spring semester in particular compete heavily with the liturgical year. Epiphany begins with the first day of classes of the spring semester, Lent lasts throughout the month of midterms and spring break vacations, Ascension Day occurs during the throes of finals, and Pentecost right as students are

running off to summer break. Summer break is the longest period of “off-time” during the school year, which contrasts to the longest period of “on-time” in the liturgical year: The non-festal “Ordinary Time” is a time for focusing on work and mission, according to Gross (25). The fall semester absorbs three of the most important holy days in the Jewish tradition, which have ongoing significance for Christians: the Feast of Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah*), the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). Jesus can be discovered in these Jewish holy days just as He can be in the spring Jewish holy day of Passover, which is now commemorated by Christians in the Eucharist, or “communion.”

The competition of the calendars is interesting, though perhaps not ironic. C.S. Lewis once wrote, “There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God, and counterclaimed by Satan.” The point is not that the academic calendar and spring break are satanic. The point is that when you inhabit Advent and focus on the spiritual significance of Christmas instead of collapsing into the commercialized, culture-ized version of the Christian holiday or when you forgo stereotypical spring break revelries to honor God and the season of Lent, you go against the grain, and culture’s pressure and peer pressure are real. However, considering that all time belongs to God and certain time is holy, choosing poorly what we do with time is not just a poor choice but can be a deep spiritual betrayal.

Rest

However (and this is a big however), the answer when it comes to a way in which to respond to the spring break phenomenon is surprising and relieving. Because *although* choosing to go on a missions trip as an alternative spring break is a good choice, it’s not required, nor is it required to stay locked in a church for the whole week observing Lent with the utmost solemnity. Perhaps we just need to refocus on the *biblical* concepts of rest and fun. Mercifully, the yoke is easy and the burden is light.

When God sanctified time, He set a precedent for rest. According to the creation account, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he *rested* from all his work” (Gen. 2:2, NIV, emphasis added). God then later commanded Israel: “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest *you must rest*” (Ex. 34:21, NIV, emphasis added).

In his book [Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel](#), John Goldingay writes, “God ‘sanctified’ the seventh day (Gen 2:3), made it holy. It is holy because it has special associations for and with God. It has been transformed in becoming more specifically a day commemorating the completion of God’s creative activity and providing for human rest and renewal” (128). However, he goes on to explain that perhaps a more accurate English equivalent is “relaxation” rather than “rest”: “Genesis does not speak of God

‘resting’ (*nuah*) on the seventh day, which might suggest being tired and needing refreshment. The object of the Sabbath was not for God to find energy for another week’s work. God worked in order then to relax, not the other way around” (128). Our time off should not be about re-energizing for another grind. Monday should not be dreaded or anticipated on Sunday. **Rest (or “relaxation”) is a time to let that apprehension go.** Instead of looking forward to what still has to be accomplished, we should look back on and celebrate what has been completed, both by us in our previous workweek and by God in His past acts of creation and deliverance. That is the gift of rest.

Make no mistake, spring break is an opportunity for rest, and there is nothing wrong and everything right with taking advantage of it as such. We can encourage our students to fully inhabit this opportunity for rest. And discipling them in how to *rest well* is something we can begin doing long before they depart for college with all its amplified spring-break pressures. Teaching by example is essential here, and we can do that by not bringing work home as much as possible and by closing the door to it completely one day a week. Honoring the Sabbath can be the most important practice toward ***instilling in them the habit of resting well that they can carry with them into their college experience.*** Remember, instilling a habit is much more powerful than imparting a principle. Also, being fully present with them and resting well on holidays and vacations sets a standard for them to learn from and live by.

Fun

Living righteously and having fun are not incompatible. God again set a precedent for this when He created the world. “Lady Wisdom” is the personification of God’s insight, and in Proverbs she speaks:

*The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works,
before his deeds of old;
I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning,
when the world came to be.
I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
when he gave the sea its boundary
so the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
Then I was constantly at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,*

rejoicing *in his whole world*
and delighting *in mankind*. (Proverbs 8:22-23, 27-31, NIV, emphasis added)

Goldingay writes, “The creation was such as to draw forth a cry of wonder, a leap of appreciation, a guffaw of amusement, a dance of delight. If Proverbs does not make the point, Psalm 104:26 does so. Looking across the ocean, the psalmist comments with amusement, ‘there... is the Leviathan that you formed to play with’ (124). The suggestion of God actually romping around with one of the creatures He created like a little boy playing with his pet dog is a stunning image. English translations keep with more tame interpretations of the verse, suggesting that the Leviathan plays *in* the sea rather than *with* God—perhaps betraying our discomfort with the idea of God being associated with play. However, the Jewish understanding has always been that of God playing *with* His creature.

Not only did the entire act of creation have associations with delight and play, so too did the seventh day of rest. Goldingay explains, “The gift of this day of relaxation and renewal [...] fits with the playfulness of Yhwh’s creation [...] and it fits with the graceful generosity of Yhwh’s creation that its object is not only to draw humanity into work but also to draw humanity into relaxation and play” (129).

In keeping with this, the Jews have a long-standing tradition of *Oneg Shabbat* (“Oneg” is the Hebrew word for “delight”). The phrase literally means “Sabbath delight.” For the Jews, “delight” does not merely refer to an abstract attitude. It is, rather, a *sensory experience*. Thus, the Jewish notion of “delight” is perhaps closest to our 21st century American concept of “having fun.” Today, Jewish and Messianic communities delight in the Sabbath by feasting (on food prepared the night before in slow cookers) and fellowshiping—basically just enjoying good food and good company. They eat, nap, spend time with friends and family, and go on walks through nature, [among other practices](#). The Jewish tradition of *Oneg Shabbat* is based on the words of Isaiah:

*If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the Lord’s holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
then you will find your joy in the Lord.* (Isaiah 58:13-14a , NIV, emphasis added)

The phrase “doing as you please” (or “your desire”) is associated with the [pleasure we receive from work performed](#).

This concept of finding delight in keeping the commands of God (such as honoring the

Sabbath) is reiterated in Psalm 119, which explores at length the phenomenon of the law/statutes/ways/precepts/decrees/commands/word of the Lord giving us delight and life. God’s act of creation was ultimately that of bringing order out of chaos, and it was an act that brought delight. Likewise, God assures us in Psalm 119 that order (in the form of commands and statutes) is not restrictive but, rather, liberating. “Order,” both physical and moral, brings delight. G. K. Chesterton confirms, “The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.” This is far cry from Joe Francis’ *Good Girls Gone Wild* that suggests that “good” and “wild” are mutually exclusive.

Certain time is set apart as holy, but, really, all time belongs to God and therefore has an ethical dimension. Similarly, the seventh day is for rest and delight/fun, but, really, the entire act of creation was, among other things, a divine act of delight. Likewise, our entire lives are meant to have a dimension of delight that is not incongruous with righteousness but, rather, a direct result of it.

This is not something that can now be intuited and grasped in theory, as much as it must be learned experientially. Cultivating an environment of delight and fun during the Sabbath and showing your students how to bring that into longer stints of time off during holidays and vacations is foundational in reclaiming this ground from pop culture. Pop culture “gets” human nature in a way the church sadly sometimes misses. Pop culture appeals to students on a very visceral level, exploiting their God-given desires. Their instincts to have fun and unwind and set apart time (for celebration) are as integral and as early in their origin as the human instincts to work, worship, and need human connection. The church has too often only offered a set of beliefs and principles where students need a sensory experience, creating a chasm between what’s right and what’s fun. Pop culture then steps in to offer cheap but instantly gratifying substitutes toward satisfying the deep God-given human desire for pleasure that the church has too often starved, while also reinforcing the misconception that “good” and “fun” are an ultimate dichotomy.

Final thoughts

As we said at the beginning, not every student travels for spring break and not every student who *does* travel for spring break participates in the stereotypical spring break experience. Whether your students are in high school or college, there is nothing inherently wrong with their desire to travel and vacation over spring break with friends.

However, it is important, especially if they are in high school, to have discussions about what that looks like for them, what kind of experience they are trying to curate, and how they can stay safe.

Alternative Spring Break

Within the margins, there is a growing disenchantment with the spring break phenomenon and the trend of taking an “alternative spring break” is on the rise (just Google “alternative spring break”). An “alternative spring break” is one that is service-oriented. Alternative spring-breakers go on mission trips and participate in service projects. This could be a very formative, powerful, and meaningful experience for your students if they show an interest in it.

Rest Well and Have Fun

Your students will need some guidance in learning how to rest *well*—binge-watching TV shows or going off on a video-gaming bender is not necessarily quality rest. Encourage them toward and facilitate healthy means for relaxing and having fun. Plan time and activities around things they do or would enjoy. Maybe allow them the opportunity to experience something new like trying a new hobby. Include them in the process of curating a spring break that is healthy and that they can get excited about. Explore with them how to spring-break in a way that honors the season of Lent and also honors the biblical practices of resting and having fun. And take this opportunity of their week off to spend some quality time with them.

Honor the Sabbath

Making a habit as a family of honoring the Sabbath is perhaps the most formative practice you can establish toward teaching your students what to do with time off—and you can establish it early on, in even their most tender years! Commit as a family to set aside one day a week specifically for the biblical concepts and practices of rest, *oneg*, and honoring holy time.

Teach by Example

Of course you should discuss with your students what is special about the Sabbath and why and how we are to honor it and honor God in it, but, more than mere discussion, they need to see an example they can imitate and be given an experience they can inhabit. Students need something beyond theory; they need a practice. Show them how to make the most of days off. Banish your work on the Sabbath and be fully present with them then, showing them how to pursue quality rest and good fun—make a meal together, play games, go outside.

Ultimately, we want our students to experience the *good life* God offers so fully that they will be able to see the stereotypical spring break for what it is: a cheap and

unfulfilling substitute. Be a safe place to which they can go for wisdom and comfort. Teach and train them, but, most of all, love and cherish them. They can experience the love of God powerfully through you, which can be such a revealing, refreshing, and redeeming contrast to the culture that seeks to exploit them.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent's Guide to Lent](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Holy Week & Easter](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Ordinary Time](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Sabbath & Rest](#)
- Check out axis.org for even more resources!
- If you'd like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, check out the [All Axis Pass](#)!

Additional Resources

- [Desiring the Kingdom](#), James K. A. Smith
- “[The Gift of Time](#)” podcast episode by Aubrey Spears for Church of the Incarnation

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A Parent's Guide to **SPRING BREAK**

Recap

- The ethos of spring break is that anything goes, you can do whatever you want, and there are no consequences—go wild, get crazy.
- Spring break is an outlet for the urges that students may already be struggling with and the pressure they may already be struggling under pre-college.
- MTV became a major force of spring break culture.
- The majority of the activities center around and encourage two main activities: substance use and sex.
- Your early, loving guidance on alcohol use can preempt poor choices and educate a naiveté that could be dangerous in a sudden situation.
- We *all* learn from pop culture, and pop culture most often portrays and encourages non-intimate sex.
- During spring break, sexual violence is the norm. Both genders are implicated in the problem, though the outcome is decidedly more dangerous for women.
- Students are not *free*; they are living under the yoke of pressure.
- Perhaps we just need to refocus on the *biblical* concepts of rest and fun.
- Our time off should not be about re-energizing for another grind. Rest (or “relaxation”) is a time to let that apprehension go. Instead of looking forward to what still has to be accomplished, we should look back on and celebrate what has been completed, both by us in our previous workweek and by God in His past acts of creation and deliverance.
- Being fully present with your kid and resting well on holidays and vacations sets a standard for them to learn from and live by.

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!

A Parent's Guide to **SPRING BREAK**

Discussion Questions

- What comes to mind when you think of spring break?
- What do most of your friends do for spring break?
- Why do you think it's become such a norm to let completely loose over spring break?
- How do you think culture and media portray spring break?
- Why do spring break destinations feel like “anything goes, no rules” environments?
- What do you think of the idea that “a ‘real’ man has sex with a lot of women?” What does it mean to be a “real” man, then?
- What do you think of the idea that female sexuality is the key component to what it means to be female? What does it mean to be female?
- How does the Bible's definition of “rest” contradict culture's definition?
- What would it look like for you to rest well? Is there anything that I can do to encourage that in you?

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