

# The Constant Invitation

By Rebecca Edwards

For almost six months, our world has lived in a state of wait-and-see. School in the spring, vacation plans, summer camps, and school in the fall, none of it has been easy to plan or anticipate what each week will bring.

If it hadn't been for my children, we would not have taken a "real" vacation this summer. Our week-long unplug to DC was cancelled early, and then down went our week-long RV trip to Mustang Island. Other than just going out of town for a long weekend and working around our respective work schedules, my husband and I had just resigned to try to get the fall started and not take a vacation at all this summer. It was just too hard to plan and too hard to take the disappointment if it had to be cancelled.

My dear children, hearing of other friends and family members going to the beach, really pushed for it. We tried several scenarios of getting down at least to Port Aransas---you know, where the "real Texas beach" starts. (Beach snob? maybe....) But even that long of a drive seemed ridiculous for just a long weekend, which is all we really had time to take.

Finally, I looked into places in Galveston. We had gone there when the children were much younger---11 years ago, in fact. We had stayed across the Seawall Blvd from the beach back then, and it was lots of trouble to play in the water. It had been their first trip to any kind of salt water, though definitely not their last. We went again with my "in-loves" for Easter one year, but I was sick almost the whole time. I wanted Galveston to be easy, and from my experience, it wasn't.

I found a nice little condo right off the beach, with our own access and even a pool if the beach was too crowded. So, with a week's notice, we told the kids and made the plans. My work and his work made arrangements. We got as much ready for school as we could since we would get back the day before it started in this weird Covid world.

Thursday was a surprisingly easy drive. We made it in less than four hours then were on the beach 30 minutes later. Over our stay, I realized how secluded and quaint and lovely our spot was--disconnected from the public beach and just passed where the seawall starts. The whole weekend, the children could go run off to the beach without us. We fixed lunch in the condo and brought it down to the beach. It was really as perfect (and easy) as we could have found.



Besides easy, another priority was the complete unplugging of normal--or at least what had become normal. Working from home, the disconnect of leaving work behind is more difficult. I needed disruption... I needed away-ness. In this place, I could feel the constant breeze, hear the undulating waves, watch the sand soak up water only to have it drown again. Cathartic---cleansing---purifying---purging. Completely not normal.

On Friday, we celebrated my husband's 45th birthday in grand style. We slept late and only got on screens for fun. We stayed to ourselves except for those sweet kids that wanted to play with my sweet kids. We read and painted and dug in the sand. There was a sudden storm that came up, and in ten minutes, we were hunkered down under the canopy, holding it tight so it wouldn't blow away. Twenty minutes later, the sun was shining again. The whole weekend was ours. No agenda. No goals. No normal. A disruption in the best way.

Sunday was going to be a rushed morning with check out at 11, things strewn about, and trying our best to get back. But our church's live stream started at 9, and I needed to "be" with church--however that happened. It was the one appointment we had for the whole weekend. With gratitude and joy, I spent Sabbath on the beach with my live-stream church family while my real-life family played in the salt water. I read the words of liturgy; I heard the music of faith. I was listening to words of truth and inspiration; thinking about service being prayer and work being worship. Pondering the eternity of God and the immediacy of His Presence dispersed with fellow pilgrims finding these truths in their own journey--all of us learning the meaning of becoming a living sacrifice.

I realized how much of pre-covid life was taken for granted--how much of the present I take for granted. I know there will still be the moments of wait-and-see (just this week is full of that with the virtual school experiment...); there will always be gray uncertainty. But there are also those golden moments of clarity with a fullness of purpose, like the sunlight after a storm. I need to be seeking those out to connect like dots of full-hearted joy--treasures on a path. "A task that requires all the joy inside of me," as my pastor said.

May it not always take a complete reset for me to realize this. May I be on the persistent hunt to breathe in mercy and exhale gratitude...like the Name of God, Yahweh, sounds like the breath that animates us all—like the ocean's constant invitation.

Thanks be to God.