

10 Ideas: Things to Do When You're Not Watching TV

Even if turning your television off completely is an unbearable thought, consider these ideas for replacing a portion of your television-watching time.

by Rob Flood

By God's incredible design, the gravitational pull of the sun keeps the planets from drifting randomly throughout space. It unites them into a "family" of heavenly bodies called our solar system. Without the sun keeping us together, all life on earth would be impossible. Orbits would not exist and chaos would reign.

Families have "suns" as well. Throughout time, they have held families together by their gravitational pull. Years ago, it was the farm or the family trade. But in many American homes today, the family "sun" is called the television. This sun is often the central point of a family's relationships. Nearly all time spent together is spent staring into this "sun". Our conversation often orbits around what we've seen ... or missed.

Many people are upset about the quality of television programming today. But television's real problem is that it's a time thief. We allow it to reign over our marriages and our children. We allow it to infringe on nearly any and every area of our lives.

Consequently, we miss out on some of the best God has for us. TV is not the only culprit. There are others ... many others. However, some of the others do not have a power button.

Some Christian organizations such as FamilyLife encourage families to take a fast from television. You may wonder, "If we fasted from TV, what would we do instead?" Below are some suggestions for alternatives to watching television. Even if turning it off completely is an unbearable thought to you, consider these ideas for replacing a portion of your television-watching time.

You will be surprised at how little you will miss the time of watching. You'll be blessed at what you'll discover. And you'll be just a little sad that you hadn't tried it before.

1. **Sleep** My wife and I have three small children. As busy as they keep us, we are completely unable to watch television until they are asleep. However, there is a reality that is hard to face—we *are tired, too*. Even parents with older children get tired. Between running from baseball to ballet to band concerts, families are exhausted. And yet many parents make it worse by sacrificing sleep to watch their favorite shows.

Once the duties of the day are done, rather than turning on the TV, you could turn out the lights. Think of the energy you'd have if you invested your evening "watching" time in longer nights of sleep.

2. **Talk** Whether it is a particular child with a certain issue or some personal, financial, or spiritual goal, there is always something to talk about. Even beyond the practical conversations, there are hopes in our hearts and events in our lives that we rarely share with those who are closest to us. One of the reasons for this is that we don't take the time to talk with each other. Additionally, our children are growing and changing before our eyes. The time we have left with them grows shorter and shorter each day. How sad that the TV steals the time from us. If we'll just turn it off once in a while, we will find the time to get to know our children, and keep getting to know them.
3. **Play Games** The point here is not to invest in blood-thirsty competition, rise above the rest and declare your ownership of both Boardwalk *and* Park Place. The point is to create some great fun together as a family, or even as a couple. Play some games that require no vulnerability or stress. Other times, play some games that will help you get to know each other. These games can spur on conversation. Like the television, playing games is still entertainment. However, unlike television, playing games builds relationships.
4. **Read Books** Some books are entertaining; some books are educational. Many that circulate in Christian circles help us know God and people better. In my home, there must be 20-30 books that I have bought with excitement and have never taken the time to read. Before I can open even one of the books, I must be willing to turn off the TV. And don't forget the lost art of reading as a family. Books like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and even *The Lord of the Rings* make for much more enriching entertainment than any of those same stories in video form. The corporate imagination of your family will be engaged in fresh ways as you read together.

5. **Home Projects** Do you have a corner of your home or garage where your "to-do projects" await completion? In my home, we have actually painted rooms two years after we've bought the paint for that room. It sat in a corner of our garage until I found the time. Whether you own your home or not, surely there are things you've expressed a desire to accomplish in your home that you have not yet done. By turning off the TV, you will have the found time you need to accomplish what you cannot now.
6. **Pray** The Scriptures tell us to pray for our pastors and our governmental leaders—even those we don't like. We're told to pray for our families, for our nation and for the return of Christ. Many of us have children. As parents, we are called to pray for our children's current and future needs, not to mention pleading with the Lord for help in parenting them well. Then we are told to pray for the sick and for those who are investing their lives in the gospel. And don't forget the need to pray for the lost. Have you wondered, as I have, where to find the time for all of this prayer?

With the TV off, you will be able to invest time in prayer. Pray alone. Pray with your spouse. Pray with your children. As Christians, we like to tell people, "I'll pray for you." Yet, instead of keeping our word, we'll switch on the TV and allow that time to be stolen from us. Fight that tendency. Turn off the television—and pray.

7. **Intimacy** The story of a man who gave his best years to the company is a familiar one, and an easy target. How familiar is the story of the couple that routinely gave their most alert and energetic hours each day to the television leaving only their most fatigued hours for each other? We don't hear it much, but it is all too common. Instead of living in this often unrecognized regret, agree with your spouse that your best hours belong to each other. You'll undoubtedly see the benefit in your time together and in your relationship. And, who knows, you may also find it far more entertaining than television could ever be.
8. **Minister** Just a couple of weeks ago, I heard an active church-going couple declare that they were too busy to minister to people. I don't know all that consumes this family's time. I do know they never miss an episode of "Survivor," though.

There are needy people all around us. They are our neighbors, our friends, our fellow church members, even our pastors. We rob ourselves of giving and receiving ministry by allowing TV to occupy a prominent place in our lives. A well-intentioned 30-minute phone call will mean more to a person than an episode of any reality TV show you might watch.

9. **Get to Know People** Becoming a student of people is important if we are ever to minister well. We would all agree that Jesus ministered perfectly to people. He knew our hearts and our make-up. He made us—naturally He knew us. Getting to know people not only takes more work for us; it also takes more time. With the amount of quality resources available in the local Christian bookstore and through the Internet, we are left with no reason for not ministering to people other than "we are just too busy." Take some time to discover how people work. You will see the benefit of that in your family relationships as well as your ministry relationships.
10. **Get to Know God's Word** God has used mankind across nearly two millennia to capture His will and His heart in a collection of writings called the Bible. Life, both now and eternally, is found within its pages. Guidance for every problem and shortcoming we have is found there. Love beyond description is promised and granted there.

What would happen if, for 30 consecutive days, you spent just a portion of your television-watching time reading through some books of the Bible you have never heard of? What would happen if you did that for a year? Television cannot promise that type of life change. How much better is the investment of time in the Word than the investment in television? The answer is beyond what words could communicate.

Discovering some of the best God has for us is just a single push-of-a-button away. Have the courage to turn it off. Then discover the countless other ways you could better spend your time. The regret will be short lived. The blessings could very well be eternal.