

ARTICLE

What are you doing with your extended time at home?

At least 7 ways you can be intentional during COVID-19

BY CANDICE WATTERS

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There seem to be two common responses to the pandemic: extreme anxiety and fear as evidenced by the hoarding of groceries and the national shortage of toilet paper, and extreme distraction as evidenced by the increase in binge watching, eating and drinking, and whole-house cleaning.

Amidst shared feelings of anxiety and extra trips to the grocery store in search of essentials, I'm hearing from friends that the coronavirus shutdown has given them time to tackle house projects they've long neglected. One mentioned organizing her closet. Another sorted through her kitchen junk drawer. Others are reading books they never thought they'd get to, binge watching shows they'd put in their queue, and streaming the latest Hollywood releases. It's understandable that we'd gravitate toward activity and distraction in the midst of what feels overwhelming, but are there other ways we might also spend this downtime?

Whether you're reading this with your remote in hand or wringing your hands, Christians "must not continue in suspense," but entrust ourselves to the Lord who controls all things. That was the gist of what Paul said to his shipmates in Acts 27 after nearly two weeks of fighting to stay afloat in a furious storm at sea—a state of peril that left the crew famished and despairing of life itself. Paul urged the sailors to eat something and not lose heart saying, "for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you" (v. 33). He knew, having heard from the Lord, that none would die aboard the ship on that particular journey. This was the same Lord who made the sea, sent the storm, and sustained the very lives of the sailors who never gave him a thought. Paul's words emboldened them. They listened, ate, and were strengthened. And true to his word, God guided the ship back to land.

Though Paul's assurance was not universal, nor permanent—those sailors all died eventually—it may have been, for them, eternal; for any one of the sailors who put his faith in God would live forever. And so it is with us. God knows the number of the hairs on our head (Luke 12:7). He has already numbered our days

(Job 14:5). And if we are trusting in him alone, he will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Not even death will be able to separate us from his love (Rom. 8:38-39).

We who belong to Christ, though we will die one day, must not continue in suspense but trust in the Lord and continue on in faithfulness in our relationships and our responsibilities. This pandemic is full of opportunities if we are open to them. Ask God what he would have you learn, how he would have you serve, and where he would have you change.

Paul said, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). Suddenly awash with more time at home with family, and likely, more unstructured down time, we’ll all be tempted to do things to help pass the time; but with a little effort, we can do things that will redeem the time.

Read your Bible, first. The way you spend the first quiet moments of the morning tends to set the tone for the day. If you begin by checking your notifications, blogs, tweets, and Facebook updates for the latest news, you’ll be tempted to gloom and frustration for the rest of the day. But if you start by reading what God has revealed about his character, our sin, and his solution for the brokenness around and inside us, we’ll have hope, and a reliable filter for everything else we read and hear each day. Before reaching for your phone, reach for your Bible.

Memorize Scripture. On Feb. 15, we started memorizing Romans 8:28 as a family. For the next six weeks, our [FighterVerses](https://www.truth78.org/apps-for-families) (<https://www.truth78.org/apps-for-families>) app moved through verses 28-39

as the coronavirus moved from a far away problem to one affecting our daily lives. God was equipping us with rock solid truths and promises to stake our lives on. Reading God’s promises gives powerful comfort. But knowing them by heart and having them come to mind throughout the activity of each day is even better. This is prime time for following David’s example of storing up God’s Word in our hearts (Psa. 119:11). It’s the Word, “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (11:105), that we most need in times of uncertainty.

Lead your children. If you’re a parent, the most important way to redeem this time is to disciple your children. You don’t need a degree in theology to lead them to the Lord. Comfort them with Scripture, memorize God’s Word together, and pray as a family. The more they see you seeking the Lord, the more they’ll see that what you profess is really what you believe. And the more you seek the Lord together, the more hope you’ll share, not in news that the virus is slowing it’s spread, but in the One who governs every germ. Lead your children to God who is lovingly governing all things for his glory and the good of his people.

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If it takes a pandemic to remind Christian parents of our most important responsibility—telling our children about the mighty deeds of God, so that they will set their hope in him (Psa. 78)—it will not have been wasted. Make the most of the opportunity, and time, to disciple your children. Need a place to start?

See Tim Challies' helpful roundup of [free and discounted resources](https://www.challies.com/resources/all-the-free-and-discounted-stuff-for-these-difficult-times/) (<https://www.challies.com/resources/all-the-free-and-discounted-stuff-for-these-difficult-times/>).

Keep short accounts. This is probably more time than you're used to having all together. A lot more. That means it's likely you'll have some friction. Rather than letting it fester, work together at being "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). Be a peacemaker by being willing to say "I'm sorry." Keep short accounts—settle squabbles quickly, and "don't let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26).

Don't forget the spring in spring cleaning. A virus can thwart the start of Spring Training, but it can't stop the buds from opening, the birds from singing, or the shoots from popping out of the ground. The trees are in bloom. And "God's mercy is over all that he has made" (Psa. 145:9). As often as the weather allows, take advantage of this change of season and take a walk with your family. Let your children see God's glory on display in what he has made, even as they watch for opportunities to love their neighbor. Though you can't get close, you can wave and shout hello and find out if they need any help. (Walks also make good dates. They're great for clearing your head and talking about more sensitive matters away from little ears.)

Read stories out loud. Good stories transport housebound readers, as well as those being read to, out of their neighborhood, out of the country, and out of time and space. By reading aloud, you're journeying together, sharing adventures, and strengthening relational bonds as you snuggle together in uncertain times.

Beyond fiction, real life tales recounting heroic living in hard times and suffering provide much needed role models and instruct young hearts, preparing them for the day when they may be called upon to sacrifice for others. For reviews of current titles and lists of books of varied genres, old and new, see [RedeemedReader.com \(https://redeemedreader.com/book-lists/\)](https://redeemedreader.com/book-lists/).

Deliver a meal, treat, or game. Many churches have a practice of members volunteering to make a meal for families when new babies arrive. Why not expand on that, doubling whatever you're making for dinner and sharing it with an elderly church member, neighbor, or even younger single friend living alone. Take a cue from Edith Scaeffler who often stretched a pot of soup by adding water to accommodate numerous late arrivals to the supper tables at L'Abri.

We recently picked up (curbside) an order of ice cream cartons and dropped it off on the porch of some friends. We rang the bell, waved through the glass, then headed home to “get together” with them over Zoom for a family game night. You could also arrange a similar porch swap of games or puzzles with friends if you're getting tired of the supply on your own shelves.

And more. There are lots of other ways to purposefully use this time at home given to us by God. Countless families are eating meals together again, uninterrupted by kids' sports schedules. It may be time to [polish table manners \(https://www.familymaking.com/blog/2017/tablemanners\)](https://www.familymaking.com/blog/2017/tablemanners) and help children develop conversation skills. (We like to ask the kids for their highs and lows from the day, giving everyone a turn to talk.) Involve the kids in menu planning and even teach them how to cook. Do you have a skill you could teach your children? Brush off a dusty hobby—woodworking, sewing, painting, gardening—and teach those skills to your children. Or together you could learn a new skill.

Plenty of how-to videos are available free online. Begin learning a language or practice a musical instrument. Write a letter (on paper!) and mail it to loved ones far away. Build a [Rube Goldberg \(https://boyslife.org/hobbies-projects/projects/159359/how-to-make-a-rube-goldberg-machine/\)](https://boyslife.org/hobbies-projects/projects/159359/how-to-make-a-rube-goldberg-machine/) and take a slow-motion video as the dominoes, Keva blocks, Legos, and odds-and-ends contraption unfolds.

This is not the day for wasting away in front of the TV or gaming console. There are church members to call and encourage (Heb. 3:13, Eph. 5:19), neighbors to check on, first responders to pray for, and children to disciple. Make the most of the days because these days are evil.

It's OK to clean out your closet, but don't make this unexpected interruption in routine primarily about catching up on shows and organizing your house. Act on Isaiah's warning: "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near" (55:6). Ask God to show you how you can join in the work that he is doing in our time. May we be a people who live our lives vigorously, intentionally—like David, who "served the purpose of God in his own generation" (Acts 13:36). May it be said of the church during the coronavirus pandemic, "at the expense of their own security and comfort, they served the purposes of God!"

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