

10 DAYS WITHOUT



DARING ADVENTURES IN DISCOMFORT
THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR WORLD AND YOU

DANIEL RYAN DAY

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"Our ability to make a difference in the world could come down to how much media we consume."

- Daniel Ryan Day, *10 Days Without*

The Axis team loved reading *10 Days Without*, especially Chapter 4: Disconnect and Discover. It hit close to home because we love media and technology—Axis probably wouldn't exist without them—but we've also seen how they have a way of sneaking up on us and consuming our spare moments, thoughts, and opportunities for human and divine connection. We hope this chapter helps you as much as it helped us, and above all, we hope it moves you to go a Weekend Without or even 10 Days Without Media!

David Eaton, Axis CEO and Co-founder

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"The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is distraction, yet that is the greatest of our wretchednesses . . . without it we should be bored, and boredom would force us to search for a firmer way out, but distraction entertains us and leads us imperceptibly to death."

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

Foreword

Let's get back to the basics.

At one time or another, every Christian has longed to carve away the calluses and clutter of life, but really...do we have a clue what that means? For some, it's opting for a less expensive vacation, not dining out as often, limiting the number of hours spent at a computer, or cutting back on all those church committees we serve on. But honestly, are these the basics Jesus would have us focus on?

It's easy to imagine that we live the Christian life, but when's the last time you, like Jesus, actually had no place to lay your head? Or consider his directives in Matthew 5:39–42: “But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

Come on, who really lives like this? Such a lifestyle seems implausible, and so we interpret his words in our own way, suggesting that Jesus was only speaking metaphorically. Well, even if he was, most of us live nowhere near that plumb line. Admit it. Few of us give others the shirts off our backs. And if handed a financial windfall? We probably would not donate most of it to Kingdom causes; instead, it would get quietly folded into the family

budget in order to widen our margins of comfortable living. Sorry, but that's the way we're wired.

Yet please don't think this book *Ten Days Without* is about to scold you for not living like a Spartan. No one is going to wag a finger at you for not giving more or living on less. Rather, my friend Daniel Day leads us on a fascinating experiment of what it might actually look like to get back to the basics—and what he discovers is absolutely captivating, as well as intriguing!

The chapter that touched me the most? It's Daniel's account of going ten days without use of his legs. I've been a quadriplegic for over forty-five years, and I would be the last one to wish paralysis on another, but I totally resonate with the insights Daniel gleaned. "Going without," whether for days or decades, actually does move one from a self-centered faith to an others-centered faith, not to mention a deeper experience of needing God desperately.

It requires great spiritual discipline, as well as a consuming adoration for the Savior, to not become seduced by the wiles and ways of our culture. And the excellent book you hold in your hands can help you get attuned to those siren calls that so often drown out the Spirit's guiding whispers: "*This is what Jesus meant; this is the better way; this is how you are to live; just walk in it.*"

So get ready to begin the journey of your life. Once you start reading *Ten Days Without*, you won't be able to put it down...or put up with anything less than the normal—or I should say the basic—Christian life.

Joni Eareckson Tada
Joni and Friends International Disability Center
Fall 2013

FOREWORD BY JONI EARECKSON TADA

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WILL CHANGE YOUR WORLD AND YOU

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Disconnect and Discover

Ten Days Without Media
to Address Distractions

- ➤ ➤ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

COLOSSIANS 3:1–2

My name is Daniel Day, and I'm going ten days without media because I need a break from distractions and overload and I need to refocus on important things! For the next ten days I will not be watching TV, listening to music, using the Internet, playing video games, looking at advertisements, or using my smartphone for anything other than making phone calls. Ten days. No media. Starts now.

Day 1...I have an addiction. It's not obvious to everyone, just to those who know me the best. Lucky for me, this addiction is neither illegal nor discouraged. In fact, billions of dollars every year are spent on helping people like me

stay hooked. The addiction has gotten so bad that it's hard for me to even imagine life without this substance. And picturing life without it is like picturing a world of darkness without any fun or happiness.

What has me so wickedly trapped? Media.

My personal weakness is a little rectangular touchscreen in my pocket. My cell phone gives me immediate access to the latest fantasy football updates, my e-mail, YouTube videos, games, and all my music. I can check social media, watch a movie, download a random dog whistle, and manage my bank account. With the touch of a finger, I spend hours flipping through different apps or surfing the web. My addiction can be so bad that when I visit relatives in other states whom I haven't seen in several months, I will still spend most of my time on my phone.

So *Ten Days Without Media* is a personal detox as I attempt to free myself from media's stranglehold on my life. It's a personal insurrection against the system that says, "The more technology we can fit into our pockets, the better." It's a way for me to cut out this part of my life and see if there is a better way to live that's simply waiting for me to sign out of my news feed.

CAN YOU REALLY GO TEN DAYS WITHOUT MEDIA?

Before we go any further in this chapter, let me say something important: going ten days without all media is virtually impossible.

I recently heard a line in a movie that stuck with me. Here's my paraphrase of what was said in *The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*: "The only place where we can get away from advertisements is to go to sleep." I found this to be true during my media fast.

One morning during my ten days without media, I found what looked like a newspaper on my driveway, but it was just a bunch of ads folded up in a little orange plastic bag. I hadn't even left my house yet, and already someone had pushed advertisements in front of my face.

On my way to work, I was met with dozens of other ads—and that doesn't include the signs of all the stores I passed. The advertisements included billboards and banners and real-estate signs and seasonal promotions. I stopped by the grocery store and heard music that was interrupted by announcements for a sale on avocados. And then I went to the office filled with coworkers listening to music.

I thought about buying those bright orange earplugs construction workers use—at least they would have blocked out the sounds and noise. I didn't know what to do about visual "noise," though. I could have driven to work blindfolded, but other drivers wouldn't have appreciated that very much.

Perhaps we can never completely get rid of media regardless of our efforts to keep the TV off, the laptop closed, and the radio silenced.

Isn't that amazing? Even if we don't want to find media, media still finds us.

But going without media is still a beneficial challenge that's worth the sacrifice.

RESCUING THE SMARTPHONE WIDOWS (AND WIDOWERS)

My media fast produced the truth about one of the deepest, darkest secrets in my family: my wife felt like a smartphone widow. All the time I spent using my phone to read e-mails, update social media, and check sports scores made her feel unimportant and unloved. I didn't realize it, but that's how she felt—like an iPhone, Facebook, and ESPN widow.

And it's not just young people who have this problem. (I'm in my twenties, so I'm going to call myself "young" for as long as my wife lets me!) I recently sat next to two older women in a coffee shop, one of whom was talking about her husband. "My husband hates the smartphone because he says if I'm not playing games, I'm checking e-mails." I couldn't help but smirk to myself. This lady was easily pushing seventy, and she spent too much time playing games on her smartphone! That's hilarious—except that it's actually not funny. Excessive media consumption can divide families and distract people from spending time with the ones they love. My wife felt like a widow, and this woman's husband felt like a widower. Sad.

What form of media represents your greatest weakness? Are you like me, tethered and tied to your smartphone all day? Does your couch have a permanent sag because of all the hours you sit on it watching TV? Maybe your time is consumed by video games or social media or texting or music. Try this: Keep a media journal for the next week. Track which media you consume and how much time you spend with it. At the end of the week, go back and add up the totals. Then ask God for forgiveness for all the wasted time. Just kidding—or maybe not.

I also invite you to ask some of the significant people in your life to see what they've noticed. If they're like the significant people in *my* life, they'll gladly tell you what's robbing them of meaningful time with you!

I experienced some amazing benefits from my ten days without media. Instead of listening to music on my phone or computer or digital player, I created some by playing the guitar and piano. Instead of watching movies or television shows, I read the Bible for the first time in a long time. And my wife loved the fact that because I couldn't use my smartphone, we spent lots of quality time together.

That's really what this challenge is all about. Unlike most of the other experiences in this book, fasting from media isn't about supporting an organization to address a global epidemic. Instead, it's about each of us doing our part to address a different kind of problem: relationships. Your family and friends want and need to spend more time with you, even if they haven't said it directly—or posted “I miss you!” on social media because they know that's the only way you'll see it!

THE REWARDS OF A MEDIA FAST

We live in a media-saturated world. It wakes us up in the morning, accompanies us to school or work, helps us get our workloads done, offers breaks during the day, connects us to all our friends, accompanies us home from school or work, entertains us before bed, sings us to sleep, and sometimes wakes us up in the middle of the night. It's virtually impossible to escape and requires a lot of

effort to ignore. Most of us have welcomed technology into our lives and homes without ever considering a very important question: Is it good for me?

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, every day the average teenager consumes over ten hours of media, including seven-and-a-half hours of uninterrupted usage (meaning they're multitasking with multiple media forms for part of the day).¹¹ How do teenagers spend that time? The list includes things like TV, movies, music, print, Internet, and video games. Isn't that crazy? Over a third of the day devoted to media consumption—that's more than an entire school day!

Media is filled with ideas, and ideas have consequences. If we believe something is true, it can change our lives for the better or worse. Media's real power and brilliance come in the *way* it teaches ideas. Tell me a random fact about monkeys during a routine conversation, and I probably won't remember it the next day. Put a random fact about monkeys into the melody of a catchy song, and I will be singing it before the song ends. And if my young children hear the song, we'll all be singing it that night. And in the morning. And every time we're in the car. And every time we're playing in the yard. And—well, you get the idea.

We need to be aware of the messages we are consuming when we watch a television show, go to a movie, or listen to music. We need discerning hearts and minds when we open a magazine or read a book. As Paul put it, we either take thoughts captive or we are taken captive by them. (Check out 2 Corinthians 10:5 and Colossians 2:8.) And please understand that when I talk about the

problem of media, I am not saying that all media is bad. I am saying that the unbridled consumption of media is bad.

My own experience turned me into a big fan of going ten days without media. It's a worthwhile and beneficial challenge that forces us into some unfamiliar but rewarding situations.

You Can Focus on Nobler Tasks

Most people want to make a difference in the big issues of our world, whether it's poverty, human trafficking, slavery, or homelessness. They strive to lead lives that count, and they want to change the world. But many of those same people also spend a lot of time watching their favorite TV shows or playing video games or following their sports team's every game or checking every bank transaction and every nugget of news. In many ways, media keeps people from living for something bigger than themselves. Media has become a diversion, an interruption, a disruption.

I already confessed to being a media addict, and going ten days without media helped me discover how much of my life is consumed by distractions. But it doesn't have to be this way. We can choose how we use our time. (Seriously, has anyone ever *forced* you to watch hours and hours of TV every night?) We can choose to spend our days pursuing significant goals and doing things that truly matter.

You Can Practice Creativity

It's no exaggeration to say that many of us have no idea what to do when our phones are out of range or the Wi-Fi stops working.

(Think about the last time it happened to you; didn't you panic just a little bit?) Our creativity has disappeared—at least, that's what Warner, a twelve-year-old boy from Iowa, admitted on day one of his experiment without media:

If you had asked me before today if I used media a lot I probably would have said no. But after today, I have realized how much I actually use it. I don't think going without media would have been so hard today if the weather wasn't so soggy. I constantly caught myself looking at my phone or going to Facebook without even thinking about it. I spent a lot of the morning sitting in my room thinking about what I'm going to do for the next ten days. I can tell this is going to be a very testing challenge.

Media is a great way to avoid getting bored, but contrary to what many of us think, boredom isn't always a bad thing. In September 2012, CNN hosted an article on its website titled “Have Smartphones Killed Boredom (and Is That Good)?”¹² The article describes today's current media-centric culture and cited a study done by the Social Issues Research Centre in Oxford, England. The study's main point: smartphones have replaced the time that we would normally be bored—time we would spend on personal thought, reflection, or simply zoning out. These days, when a light turns red or we are waiting in a line for coffee, we are on our phones checking e-mail or scores, playing games, or texting. We have no more downtime. Just look around you next time you're at a stoplight or in the store to see how preoccupied we are. It's crazy.

The research center points out the key role downtime and boredom play in fueling creativity. We have all experienced this to one extent or another. You know how people seem to say that the best ideas come to them in the shower? Maybe that's because we leave our smartphones on the counter! (Well, most of us do.) The shower may be the only place most of us get away from media—unless, of course, you listen to music when you bathe.

God creatively created you to be a creative being! We all benefit from creativity. We need to be creative at our jobs and in our schoolwork. We seek to be funny and original and entertaining—traits that rely on creativity. Set the noise and distractions aside, and let your mind wander. Embrace boredom and silence, and let your brain do its thing.

You Can Rediscover Simpler Pleasures

Media also can slowly erode our ability to enjoy simple pleasures. It's a phenomenon called *anhedonia*, which means “the loss of pleasure,” or joylessness and cheerlessness. This concept is talked about in detail in Dr. Archibald Hart's book *Thrilled to Death*. Hart, a psychologist, discussed the pleasure center of the brain and the effect of constant media exposure. He described the pleasure center of the brain as being like “a barrel without a bottom—it never gets full. The more you give it, the more it wants.”¹³

According to a TED talk given by psychologist and professor emeritus at Stanford University Dr. Philip Zimbardo, the problem with overloading the brain with technology is that it rewires the brain to feel pleasure only when it is being overloaded. Simple pleasures like a sunset begin to fall victim to high-action movies.

Dr. Zimbardo described this as the digital rewiring of the brain. He said that the average video game-playing teenage boy would in essence lose his ability to experience real pleasure in the real world.¹⁴

God created us for relationship—with him and with others. Excessive media can consume the time and energy we ought to be using to build those relationships. So taking a break from media can help our brains refocus on the things, people, and experiences that provide genuine pleasure—whether that’s our spouses, a crackling fire on a cold winter night, or the smell of a fresh, hot pizza straight from the oven. (Man, thinking about that pizza is making me hungry!)

THE ELUSIVE CONCEPT OF FREE TIME

What may surprise you most about a media fast is the amount of time that opens up each day—time that can be spent in prayer, Scripture reading, deep conversation, service to others, and slowing down the pace of life.

During my ten days without media, I woke up one morning at 5 a.m. On purpose? Hardly. When you are watching someone else’s kids, sometimes you don’t have a choice. Normally I see 5 a.m. only if I’m going fishing, hunting, or leaving on vacation. In fact, my first reaction when seeing the clock that early is: “Wow! I forgot there are two 5s in one day.” But if the kiddos want to get up at 5, I’ll be getting up then too.

I managed to find the energy to get out of bed, and I went downstairs with my buddy CW—the two-year-old responsible

for my early awakening—to find something to do. (He and his five-year-old sister were staying with us while his parents enjoyed a much-needed break.) As we got downstairs, it hit me: “I have three hours before I need to be at work!”

Typically I wake up with just enough time for a shower and the drive to work. And on most mornings, I don’t even have breakfast until I get to the office around 8 a.m. So having all this downtime wasn’t part of my usual routine. Normally downtime is not a problem. By turning on my cell phone, watching an episode of *The Cosby Show*, or checking Facebook, I can fill up any “margin” in my day with stuff. But today I had more than two hours to kill, and I couldn’t use any media. What to do?

I began with a made-up stretch routine that felt amazing. Then I actually sat down and ate breakfast without any distractions (other than a two-year-old). Did you know that it’s possible to eat breakfast at a table without anything else to do? It was news to me too!

I then unloaded the dishwasher, fed CW, reloaded the dishwasher, played with CW, set the table for breakfast, fixed breakfast for my wife and the rest of the kids, enjoyed a nice leisurely shower, took my time getting ready after my shower, and made it to work on time. Crazy, I know! What a powerful reminder of how much time we can miss in just one day!

Here’s an amazing statistic from the same Kaiser study cited earlier: the average American teenager will consume approximately five hours of TV and/or movies per day, and every year those numbers go up.¹⁵ That’s just TV and movies, not video games or other media! I fall well short of that number, but that’s

largely because of the woman I married. “Old Daniel” watched lots of TV and movies—anywhere from fifteen to almost forty hours every week! That’s a whole lot of wasted time every day.

But other forms of media still consume much of my day, and my media fast reminded me that I have a lot more free time than I want to admit—it’s just a question of how I use that time. I’m confident the same is true for you too.

TIME FOR ACTION

Are you ready to disconnect so you can reconnect with the people who matter most in your life? The action steps for this challenge are much simpler than some of the other experiences in this book. I have just two main recommendations:

Create Your “Fast” List

What media will you abandon and avoid for your ten days? You could get rid of all media distractions, but that probably would require moving to an isolated cabin and cutting off all ties with civilization for ten days. In other words, it just isn’t practical. I recommend going to the media journal I mentioned earlier in the chapter. See which types of media are consuming the biggest chunks of your week, and make sure they’re on your list to avoid.

Here’s the key: chart a course that works for you. This isn’t about legalistic adherence to a list of set-in-stone rules. God will still love you if you have to spend time online for your job, and God can still use your sacrifice to draw you closer to him and to other people.

Create Your “Feast” List

I recommend starting your media fast on a weekend. For most of us, there’s already more downtime than on a weekday, so it’s simpler to spend more time with God and with your family and friends.

Next, prepare to gorge yourself on meaningful relationship time. Get ready to dive into an ocean of quality time with God and with others. Soak up the calmer schedule, and bask in the silence. Intentionally pursue face time and God time during your ten days without media.

A BEAUTIFUL TOOL FOR MAKING CULTURE

If you walk away from this chapter convinced media is inherently evil, then I’ve failed you. Media is as evil as a brick—it can be constructive or destructive. What you do with it makes it good or bad. Timothy Keller defined art and positive “culture making” as anything that promotes human life and flourishing¹⁶—which means bad art and culture would take away from and diminish human life and flourishing.

Sometimes the lines are clear, but other times they’re fuzzy. Does spending seven-and-a-half hours alone with media promote human life and flourishing? For the most part, I’d say no. Does going to dinner and a movie with your significant other promote human life and flourishing? Probably. Does enjoying a football game with friends promote human life and flourishing? If you’re watching the Carolina Panthers, absolutely! (Sorry, sports fans, I had to squeeze in one plug for my favorite team!)

Media can be a beautiful tool for culture making. It can promote human life and flourishing. Technology that allows us to connect with family thousands of miles away can be a great thing. A movie that is challenging and epic, full of rich ideas about family and adventure—that can be a great thing. Inspiring music that helps people cope with the human condition and understand their place in the world—that can be a great thing too. Sadly, much of the media produced in our culture falls short of this ideal.

The problem of excessive media is a global issue. When I was in Romania working with orphans for four months in 2005, a translator told me that most of the children learn Spanish at a relatively young age because they watch so many Spanish soap operas. The good thing about that is they learn a language; the bad thing is that they are exposed to sex-infused programming that is not appropriate for children (or for adults). I also heard on *The Phil Vischer Podcast* that Japan is having a problem getting men to marry and have kids because dating cuts into their time playing video games or on other devices¹⁷—a negative result.

But even with media's potential for greatness, we all benefit from a break. Our brains need a rest. If we continue consuming media at our current rate, we run the risk of damaging our healthy relationships, decimating our ability to experience pleasure, and never contributing to solving big issues like poverty or human trafficking. Our ability to impact the world, in many ways, could come down to how much media we consume.

Has a fast ever sounded so appealing?



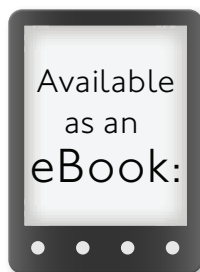
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