



# HOW TO FIND MORE TIME FOR BOOKS

## *a guide*

*Wake Up. Shower. Coffee. Eight minutes of quiet time before the kids wake up. Take them to school. Head to work. Pick the kids up from school. Come home. Eat dinner. Help the kids with their homework. Ten minute check in with your spouse. Time for bed.*

Does this sound like a pretty normal day for you?

Chances are, you'd like to read more books. You value the process and the outcome of reading, the chance to learn, to exercise your imagination, to grow. But you're so busy . . . where can you find time?

One book can change a life. For me, it was C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* the summer after I graduated from high school. Those of us who have had an experience like this value books and would love to find more time to read them. How do we get from here to there?

There's probably more opportunity in your day for reading than you're aware of. With a little discipline and a little creativity, with a little intentionality and effort, we can all find time to read more. Below are a dozen tips I hope will help you find the time to read even one more book this year than last.

### *1. Read first thing in the morning or last thing before bed.*

Admit it: you don't have control over your day. Your hours are hijacked by professors assigning papers, children getting sick, and bosses dishing out tasks like Oprah dishes out cars. But the two times of the day that you are most likely to have some modicum of control are the beginning and the end. In an article entitled "Obama's Secret to Surviving the White House Years: Books" Michiko Kakutani wrote, "Most every night in the White House, (Obama) would read for an hour or so late at night." All of us have a measure of responsibility, but few of us have the same level as the president of the United States. If presidents can find an hour to read most every night, I bet we can find some time too.

### *2. Don't leave home without a book.*

Be opportunistic. We've all spent hundreds of collective hours in waiting rooms at the dentist's office, at a restaurant waiting on a tardy friend, or in the pickup line waiting for children to get out of school. Keep a book in hand as you go, knowing these opportunities arrive unexpectedly—better to spend them working through a book than scrolling social media. Which brings me to the next tip . . .





### *3. Spend less time on social media.*

I had to go there, didn't I? And no, I'm not a cranky curmudgeon complaining about "the Millennials" (after all, I am a Millennial). Research indicates that social media usage depletes our mental energy. Bradley Wright and David Carreon, in a *Christianity Today* article about self-control and willpower, write, "Another cognitive energy waster is frequent use of email and social media. Each time we check an account, we have to decide what to do with the message, post, snap, or tweet that we just looked at." This constant checking and deciding depletes our mental energy, with the result that we have less in our reserves for reading books. Pursue the discipline of checking email and social media at predetermined, regular times during the day rather than sporadically and randomly scrolling. In doing so, you'll have more in the tank when you want to read a book.

### *4. Watch less TV.*

While I'm complaining about social media, I might as well complain about TV. It's not all bad. In fact, you probably should watch some TV. Like books, television shows and movie are creative arts that reflect the creativity of the One whose image we bear. But if you say you value reading, but spend ten hours a week watching TV and only thirty minutes reading, you're probably kidding yourself. Try to cut your TV watching in half and use the extra time for books. You'll be amazed at how much time you gain for reading.

### *5. Join—or start—a book club.*

Reading in groups is a fun and encouraging way to read. It offers accountability—you need to have finished the required chapters before showing up—as well as insight—you get to hear the perspectives others have on the book that may not have occurred to you. While reading in any group is fun and helpful, try to join a group of people in diverse life stages with diverse cultural backgrounds. The best book clubs include women and men of different ethnicities, incomes, and life stages.

### *6. Set goals.*

The best time to do this is at the new year, but there's no bad time to start. If you don't have any reading goals, start now. You can set a daily goal (read twenty minutes each night before bed); a weekly goal (read 100 pages each week); a monthly goal (finish one book a month); or a yearly goal (read fifty-two books this year). Your goal can be based on time, page count, book count, or even about reading various kinds of books (read ten novels and ten non-fiction books this year). Setting goals gives you a target to aim for and a clear progress report. But make sure you're adaptable; don't beat yourself up if you're not reaching your goals. Adjust them as you go based on what's realistic.

### *7. Compete!*

Similar to joining a book club and setting goals, adding a little competition to the mix helps everyone. Maybe it's with a group of friends or maybe it's within your family. Incentivize reading by competing for the most pages, most hours, or most books in a time period. If you do this with your family, make sure to require a brief recap of each book read to encourage not only the amount of books read, but comprehension of the content that has been consumed.

### *8. Listen to audiobooks on your commute or while you exercise.*

This is one of the most helpful ways to read more. Friends, you're not cheating if the book is read to you! Most adults have some sort of commute during the day. Don't waste this time. One helpful way to utilize it is by listening to audiobooks. Another golden opportunity for audiobooks is while you exercise. Are you a runner or a cyclist? Plug in some earbuds while you're at it! As you do, consider which kinds of books are best to listen to and which are best to read book-in-hand. I personally prefer to read most non-fiction in the form of a physical book. However, novels and memoirs—especially those read by the author—make for great audiobook experiences.





### *9. Understand the different kinds of reading.*

Mortimer Adler, in *How to Read a Book*, differentiates between four levels of reading: elementary, inspectional, analytical, and syntopical. On one end of the spectrum, elementary reading is essentially the ability to put together and comprehend words, sentences, and paragraphs. On the other end of the spectrum is syntopical reading, which is academic reading and research conducted for mastery of a particular subject. Most of our reading is done in the middle—inspectional and analytical reading. Inspectional reading could be defined as intentional and careful skimming, not absentmindedly flipping through the pages, but intelligently working your way through the book, reading the introduction and conclusion, the first and last pages of each chapter, the headers and subheads, looking for the main arguments and ideas of the book. Analytical reading is a more careful reading of each word of a book. I needed permission to read inspectionally. For a long time in my life, I thought each book must be read analytically or it didn't count. Understanding the different ways to read frees you up to read some books more quickly and others more carefully, which will result in more overall books being read in the amount of time you have.

### *10. Read on vacation.*

You may only get five or seven days of vacation a year. Some of you may not get a vacation every year at all. But for those who do, don't take off without several books in your bag. While you fly to your destination, while you lie on the beach, while you relax in the evenings away from the tyranny of email, make the most of your time and read!

### *11. Read aloud as a family.*

One struggle many parents face is finding the time to read books when your children demand so much of your attention. A helpful way to do both-and is to read aloud as a family. And don't assume that the books you read to your children are useless for you as an adult. C. S. Lewis said that any book worth reading as a child is worth reading again—and often much more so—as an adult. He was right.

### *12. Cultivate discipline.*

Discipline breeds discipline. If we work to become self-controlled and disciplined in one realm of our lives, that will bleed over into other realms; on the other hand, if we only want to be disciplined in one area of our lives and neglect the others, we will struggle to be disciplined in any area. In your efforts to find more time to read, pursue a life of discipline. In your nutrition, exercise, work, Bible study, prayer, relationships, and play, pursue the kind of discipline that honors Christ and allows us to make the best use of the time.

Some of these ideas may work for you and others may not. I hope you can leave with three or four new strategies to make time for reading—even if it means you are only able to read one more book this year. After all, one book can change a life.

