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# We Pulled the Plug This Week

MATT SOPER

*(adapted from a church bulletin article)*

We pulled the plug this week—literally.

In a fit of inspiration mixed with substantial resignation, we embarked on a year without television. By that I mean we “unplugged” our cable service, which is the only way we get reception in our area of Culver City, California, and will use the television for occasional videos only.

Now, if you think I am going to deliver a sanctimonious lecture on the evils of the boob tube and the nobility of our decision, relax. I will miss the History and Discovery channels, ESPN, Fox News and Fox Sports West, and any channel showing lions and hyenas. And our girls will miss Disney and Nickelodeon.

But the simple fact is we saw ourselves growing too dependent on the television. It was too easy, too convenient. It wasn't bad. It just crowded out to many other good things, like conversation, reading, and play.

Did I mention conversation? One of the reasons television is so enjoyable is because it is passive entertainment. You don't do much other than receive the broadcast. It requires no thought, just observation. (By the way, surfing the Internet is not too far removed from surfing television channels). We found ourselves going too easily to the television as our “default” option. A mind can go soft just as a muscle can, and too much mental passivity brings on the mental equivalent of muscle atrophy. So we took the plunge.

Related to this, as I prepared a message on “daily bread” in a series on the Lord's Prayer, I was struck by just how far removed most of us are from having to literally worry about our daily provisions. James Mulholland, in his book *Praying Like Jesus: The Lord's Prayer in a Culture of Prosperity*, notes we often fail to acknowledge the deep poverty of the people to whom Jesus preached and taught. Jesus taught his disciples to pray “give us this day our daily bread” because finding enough to eat was a serious problem. What does it mean to pray “give us this day our daily bread” when we are so blessed?

The fact that I regard a temporary fast from television as a significant step of simplicity is almost ridiculously humorous.

The other day as I was driving, I saw a man riding his bicycle to the market. He looked so serene! I experienced a twinge of longing as I considered the sheer simplicity of not owning a car and not having to drive all over the place doing errands, giving rides, commuting to work (acknowledging, of course, the many limitations and inconveniences this would impose).

But stay with me a moment here. At what point do all conveniences actually *deprive* us of a better quality of life? It's a delicate issue and hard to clarify with precision, but can we acknowledge that with e-mail and cell phones and Palm Pilots and television and answering machines—all going full blast—something is lost in the blare? Like conversation? Like reflection? Like community?

I remember visiting my grandparents' house as a boy and marveling at how quiet the house was. I can still hear the tick-tock of the big grandfather clock in the living room, and how its sound penetrated the whole house and, somehow, enhanced the silence. What a memory.

So I'm looking forward to this little adventure. I think it'll be great.

MATT SOPER

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