



500

*Hours Together*

A One-Year Challenge



# Challenge Accepted

There are 8,760 hours in a year. You'll spend roughly 2,080 of those hours at work. On average, almost 900 hours swiping on social media. How much time are you spending with your family?

And what could your family look like if you spent intentional time this year pursuing the people you love most? It could be inspiring ... or eye opening. One year. Five-hundred hours. A lifetime of impact.

Ready? Let's go.

We've gathered a few things here to get you started.

- Why 500 hours? (And other things you need to know.)
- Printable tracking pages.
- 52 creative ways to spend time together.
- Conversation starters for when communication runs dry.
- 6 creative date ideas.
- Why intentional, quality time matters.
- 10 ideas for creating quality time with your kids.



# Why 500 Hours?



At FamilyLife, we believe in pursuing the relationships that matter most. And some of the most important relationships outside of your relationship with Christ are with your family. So we wanted to create something to help you intentionally pursue the people God gave you.

We like to dream big—for our families and yours—and we know that quality time is intentional time. So we thought: ***What could a family look like if they spent an entire year tracking their time together?***

And we did a little number crunching: one hour together a week, for a little staycation, one planned date a month, one overnight getaway a year (or at home). Taking that tried and true template (there's no exact formula that works for every marriage!) just a step further, we came up with “500 Hours Together”—not too big, definitely not small.

Like any other area you hope to see improvement in, a little challenge and intentionality goes a long way.



# How does it work?

The concept is simple. Print off a tracker (found in this handy-dandy starter pack!), tape it up somewhere you'll see it regularly: fridge, bathroom mirror, bedroom, you get the idea. Then keep up with the time you intentionally spend with family members.

The rest is up to you. But don't worry, we're here to help. If you haven't already, enable "500 Hours" notifications on the FamilyLife app. We'll send you reminders to track your hours and ideas along the way. And don't forget to follow us on social media for monthly tips, inspiration, and to see how the FamilyLife team is doing in their own family challenges (yep, we'll be sharing our own wins and struggles).





# What

## **counts as time together?**

We'll be tracking hours we spend with family members that are free(ish) of distractions and focused on each other (or at least intentionally beside each other). And we know this will look different for everyone based on your own family circumstances and/or season of life. Don't overthink it. Does it feel like quality time together? Mark it down. Feel disconnected in the moment? Don't mark it down.

We get that families aren't all about singing songs on a roadtrip or running through a sprinkler. Realistic, practical time together also builds stronger, more resilient families. Laughing while walking through Costco on a Friday night is all you can squeeze in one week? There's wholeness in that.

# What

## **if we fail?**

Be careful not to think of 500 Hours as a competition, but a challenge. A template for intentionality, not a formula. None of us will do this perfectly. There will be times it feels unattainable ... or maybe even unwanted.

If at the end of the year you've only logged 100 hours? Or maybe only 50? That's time together you likely wouldn't have had. And just by making an effort, you've gained a shift in focus that could impact the next year and possibly change the trajectory of your family.

Fifty or 100 hours with your spouse? We'd call that a win.



# What

## *if my family isn't on board?*

Almost every marriage will come to a point where one partner pursues more than the other. That's a tough place to be. But we want to encourage you to press in anyway. Invite a family member to lunch. Offer to watch a movie your child's been wanting to see. Ask one of them to go for a short walk after dinner. And absolutely track those hours, even if you just place your tracker somewhere only you can see it. God sees your efforts.

Or maybe you've been through a season (or several) where marriage or family has been hard. Coming together even for dinner feels awkward. If that's the case, take it slow. What tiny steps could you add into your day that encourage togetherness? A hug and some warm words given as one of you heads out the door in the morning.

If this is your reality, don't focus on the hours. Focus on the effort. And know that we'll be praying for you.

# What

## ***if we want to do more than 500 hours?***

We applaud you. If your season of life allows it (again: this is a template, not a formula), shoot for the sky. But let us also challenge you in a different direction. Who do you know that could benefit from your family's time and energy?

Know a couple with young kids struggling to track 30 minutes? Pick 'em up a gift card to a local coffee shop and offer to watch their kids for an hour. Invite a homesick college student to dinner or organize a date night at your church for local foster parents. Or maybe you have the time to invite couples in your neighborhood for a weekly Bible study.

Dream bigger with us: How could God use your family?



# Check in

## ***and tell us how you're doing!***

Challenges are hard on your own. So consider us your accountability buddy. We're taking this challenge with our families, too. So drop in on social media and tell us how you're doing by using #500HoursTogether and #FamilyGoals. We'll also be asking from time to time.

Let's celebrate those wins together and create a community of families who root for each other's success.





# 52

## Creative Ways To Spend Time Together

- Coffee date.
- Walk the dog together.
- Volunteer at an animal shelter.
- Host a Bible study.
- Recreate your first date your spouse.
- Read through a Psalm each morning.
- Browse a local bookstore.
- Do a puzzle.
- Try a new recipe.
- Visit a museum.
- Binge an old-school TV show.
- Shop for a food pantry.
- Go for ice cream.
- Try a workout class.
- Start an our-family-only book club.
- Double date with a friend and their child or spouse.
- Get professional photos made.
- Visit an orchard or other pick-your-own farm.
- Picnic.
- Go hiking.
- See a play at your local theater.
- Visit a new town for a day.
- Eat at a new restaurant.
- Go fishing.
- Play a sport (pickleball, maybe?).
- If married, park the car and make out like when you were dating.
- Go backyard camping.
- Schedule a mid-week lunch together.
- Zoo trip. Ride the train!
- Make gift bags for a nursing home.
- Check out a local festival or fair.
- Watch each other's favorite movie.
- Find your town's best dessert.
- Go to a high school football game.
- Borrow (or buy) a telescope and spot the planets.
- Pretend you're tourists in your hometown.
- Go to an arcade.
- Have a lake/beach day.
- Play board games.
- Take a spontaneous drive.
- Go thrift shopping.
- Plan and host a dinner party.
- Play a competitive round of mini-golf.
- Have a selfie photo shoot around town and print into a book.
- Plan scavenger hunts as a family.
- Listen to live music (or find a karaoke night!).
- Rent a yurt, cabin, or tent for a weekend.
- Make a family bucket list.
- Introduce each other to something you love doing.
- Snuggle and share your day's "highs & lows."
- Give each other a back, hand, or foot rub.





## When Conversation Gets Stuck: 25 Questions to *Dive Deeper*

By Lisa Lakey

On a recent anniversary date with my husband, I filled him in on upcoming appointments and activities for the kids. He filled me in on when he'd be out of town the following month, and we talked about a couple of work projects we were each doing. Then ... silence.

And it continued as he paid the tab and we headed to a movie, complete with popcorn and two action-packed hours we didn't have to fill with small talk.

In our weak defense, our house had just recovered from two weeks of illness, health concerns over parents, back-to-school insanity, and it being nearly two months since we'd enjoyed a meal or cup of coffee together without TV or the chatter of an energetic 9-year-old. Surely this lack of emotional or mental depth to our conversation didn't speak volumes of the state of our relationship.

Or did it?



## 25 questions to ask each other

Alone time with anyone in your family might not come easy. You've got a family life that can't seem to function without your constant direction, a demanding job that pushes past the 9-5, aging parents to care for, church events and Bible studies, or maybe just more volunteer opportunities than hours in the day. (I mean, who can say no to building shelters for the homeless, organizing coat closets, and reversing climate change through hosting a six-course dinner fundraiser? Not you.)

But sometimes, the more time you spend apart the harder conversation can be. Sounds counterintuitive, right? But instead of opening the doors to communication, it can actually slam them closed and lock 'em on the way out. Why? Because you no longer feel connected, with that level of trust and intimacy to get you past surface-level convos with each other.

(Or maybe you're all just so exhausted that you can't muster the energy for anything past immediate needs—shower, food, sleep. My family's been there, too. Frequently.)

But connection requires communication. So when the words won't come, how do we nourish that relational necessity? Try these conversation starters to go a little deeper. Store 'em in your phone, nightstand, or that kitchen drawer where you throw literally everything else.





1. What was a high point for you this week? A low point?
2. What is your first memory?
3. What do you wish we could do more of together?
4. How can I pray for you this month?
5. Tell me one way I can better support you in the load you're carrying right now?
6. Do you have a dream you hope to accomplish?
7. If you could take a class to learn anything, what would it be?
8. Outside of work or school, what is the biggest stressor in your life right now?
9. Is there anything I can help with to make life a little easier for you?
10. What is your favorite memory of us?
11. What changes would you like to see in your life five years from now? Ten years?
12. What is your favorite thing to do to relieve stress?
13. If we could plan a weekend away as a family, where would you want us to go?
14. What do I do that makes you feel loved?
15. What's one way I could love you better?
16. What are five words you would use to describe yourself?
17. What is your happiest memory from childhood?
18. What is one thing you wish more people knew about you?
19. If you could pick one area of your character to grow in, what would it be?
20. When have you felt closest to God?
21. What is the best piece of advice someone ever gave you?
22. What are two things that make you feel happy?
23. What are three things you would include on your bucket list? (Explain this to younger kids: the list of things you want to do in your lifetime...before you "kick the bucket".)
24. If you could give younger you one piece of advice, what would it be?
25. What is one thing you're grateful for lately?





# 6 Fun Date Ideas You Might Not Have *Considered*

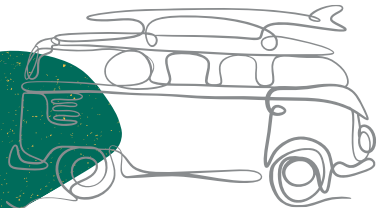
By Sherri Oehme

To be honest, it can be hard to even find the time to plan a date night beyond the babysitter's arrival and the first round of "Where do you want to eat?" ... "I don't care." And then you end up at the same go-to restaurant you always do for date night.

But where's the fun in that?

If you're ready to think outside the typical dinner and a movie, we've got you covered.

Here are six out-of-the-ordinary, fun date ideas to venture out with the most important person in your life. (But carving out the time to make it happen? That's on you.)



## 1. Plan an **"unplanned"** road trip.

Got a quarter and some gas money? Jump in the car with your sweetie and flip the coin—heads you drive right, tails takes you left. Then, whenever two major roads or highways meet, flip the quarter again. You can make the rules as you go; the only set rule is you must flip the quarter every time you reach an opportunity to turn.

Add a little extra excitement by packing an overnight bag to stay at a newfound bed-and-breakfast, or bring a tent and some sleeping bags to cozy up under the stars.



## 2. Create a **date-night** to-do list and go for it.

When my husband and I first did this, we included things like: help a stranger (we helped a woman change her flat tire on the side of the road), find a beautiful setting to draw (you don't have to be an artist!), play a child's game together (Hangman or Guess Who? are good choices), visit a dollar store and pick out "gifts" for each other.

The possibilities are endless—just make sure you add creativity and a big dose of playfulness.

## 3. Be **foodies** for a day.

Visit a gourmet candy store and take turns picking out one piece of several different flavors of candy from the case. Then find a quiet spot to taste test each piece—half for her, half for him. Be flirty and feed your spouse their half before indulging in yours. Decide together which pieces are favorites so you can make a note in your phone for future visits.

Other treats to try might include frozen yogurts or cookies ... or if sweets aren't your thing, try gourmet popcorn, flavored olive oils, dips, meat jerkies, hot sauces, coffee samples, etc.

## 4. Do a **scavenger** hunt.

Search the web for online scavenger hunts in a city near you—or work several as you travel to a destination. These do cost a small fee to download to your phone, but the only things required are good walking shoes (be ready for two to three miles of walking), a pencil and small pocket notebook (to figure out clues), and your phones (with a good charge).

Although you're being timed online, set your own pace to take in some history, snap some fun photos, or stop for a snack or lunch.



## 5. Find a new favorite restaurant for date night.

After we moved to a new city, we began missing our favorite Asian restaurant. And the few we tried hadn't yet satisfied our taste buds. So we made it a Saturday mission to find a new favorite using crab Rangoon as our measuring stick.

After compiling a list of restaurants to try, we decided which categories we would judge using a scale of 1 to 10. By the time we finished our fourth order of crunchy-creamy goodness, our bellies felt a bit unsettled, so we had to call it off—but without disappointment.

After tallying our votes and visiting the winner for lunch the following week, we were excited to have discovered a new local favorite.

## 6. Bring your reading to life.

When I became captivated by Beverly Lewis stories of the Amish country, my hubby arranged an anniversary trip to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Touring the countryside and small towns like those she had described, seeing the farms, and shopping at the roadside markets was a thrill. (And witnessing an Amish community auction was an unplanned bonus!)

Our reading has also taken us to Mansfield, Missouri, home of Laura Ingalls Wilder, who authored the Little House books, and to the setting for *The Shack*—Multnomah Falls in Oregon.

***Having fun with your spouse is always a good idea, so try adding a bit of creativity to your next date night. We've found that creativity breeds even more creativity—like, why stop at one waterfall? Or, let's read a book together. Or maybe even create a scavenger hunt for your own town.***

Your goal? Simply to enjoy some special time with your sweetie. Use the fun date ideas above or challenge each other to come up with some adventures of your own. Whatever you do ... **Go!**





## Why Intentional, Quality Time Matters

By Carlos Santiago

We're a high-maintenance couple. If my wife and I go a day without talking over a cup of coffee or taking a walk around the neighborhood, we feel it. Without spending intentional, quality time with each other, we quickly get out of sync. When we do, our patience wears thin, our tones get harsh, and bickering over small things increases. The speed at which disconnect can occur always shocks me.

We're not alone. Every relationship experiences something similar.





## *The relational drift*

The drift from order to chaos is the natural way of the universe. (Yes, the second law of thermodynamics applies to relationships, too.) Over time, the chaos in your relationship will increase. You will grow apart from your spouse, you will lose the ability to talk to your children, your faith will fade, and the family harmony you once had will be lost. Unless you actively and intentionally fight against it.

You may be able to ignore the maintenance schedule on your car for years without a problem. But imagine a SpaceX rocket attempting a liftoff without the proper maintenance. The failure would be spectacular. The more complicated something is, the more maintenance it requires. And marriages are complicated!

Do you want a marriage only capable of short trips around the neighborhood? Or one that can soar out of this world?





## Quality time: How to fight the drift

Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

The word translated as “hold fast” is “dabaq.” It means to cleave, to cling to or adhere, to catch by pursuit, to follow hard after, be joined (together), overtake, to pursue hard. This word does not imply a one-time occurrence. It is active, and it is a warning.

We must pursue each other hard and “hold on tight,” because there will be forces trying to tear your marriage apart from the moment you say, “I do.”

Some forces will be big and obvious, like a storm: a sudden sickness, job loss, working 65+ hours a week, parenting small children, running a side business, moving, or going to night school. Other forces might be more subtle, like a slow ocean current: spending too much time scrolling on your phone, binge-watching shows, playing video games, or any number of things. They seem harmless, maybe even enjoyable, but over time, they have a similar effect. One day you notice you’ve drifted so far from your spouse you don’t know if you have the strength to make it back.

Whether the distance comes all at once or develops slowly over the years, our instinct is to do nothing. But we are called to “dabaq”—to hold on tight and not allow ourselves to drift apart. And when we notice there is distance, to pursue each other ... hard.

What we need is a regular marriage maintenance schedule—a steady rhythm of intentional quality time designed to push against the drift.

So how can we inject intentional quality time into our marriage?



## **1. Start small.**

Quality time is more than date nights and vacations. While they should be a regular part of your maintenance plan, an occasional fancy date or vacation is usually not enough to compensate for strong currents of drift. In fact, they can sometimes do more harm than good, especially if we expect too much from them.

What we need is consistency, and for that, we need to think small. A 1% change in direction might not seem like a big deal. After a foot, 1% translates into less than a quarter inch. But try and reach the moon, and a 1% difference will translate into over 4,000 miles.

If you and your spouse feel thousands of miles apart, start with a 1% change.

## **2. Establish new daily rhythms.**

Most of the things we do each day we do on autopilot. You probably didn't put much thought into how you were going to brush your teeth, get dressed, get the kids to school, or make it to work. Activities like these are routine, and we accomplish them without much conscious thought.

But what if, built into the normal rhythms of your marriage, were things that naturally brought you closer together? What if activities that fight against drift became habits? It's not that difficult.

Yesterday, as soon as dinner was over, I reached down and started lacing up my shoes in silence. A few moments later, my wife met me at the front door. We were halfway down the block before I realized we never made a conscious decision to go for a walk together. We simply did what we were used to doing. Before long, the conversation started to flow.

A 1% change to your daily routine might be something as simple as greeting your spouse with a hug at the end of each workday or sharing a cup of chamomile tea after the kids have been put to bed. What you can do will look different depending on your season of life. But the most important thing is consistency.

Don't let a day go by without connecting.

### **3. Understand quality vs. quantity.**

Most of us lead busy lives. We're expected to be all things to all people. We multitask and carry more responsibility than we were ever designed to bear.

We know we should do more to maintain our marriage but can't figure out how. So we make excuses and rely on quality time over quantity. But this is a false dichotomy. Our marriages need both quantity and quality.

First, work toward establishing daily rhythms of connection. Then, go deeper with rhythms of regular sex, date nights, and romantic getaways. An established foundation of reliable connections takes the pressure off all these things. Instead of looking to them to fix problems, they can be what they were meant to be, dedicated times of celebrating each other.

### **4. Be ready to fight for it.**

Before we had kids, we had plenty of time together and romantic getaways were easy to take. Once our life season changed, money and time got tight. We had to fight for every moment together.

Some years, we relied on credit card reward points for our hotel nights. Others, we creatively arranged for the kids to have sleepovers while we enjoyed a romantic kid-free night at home. Whether it was fighting to get off the on-call list at work, fighting for one more ounce of surplus breast milk for the sitter, fighting against the guilt of leaving our kids, or simply fighting to find something fun to do, making time for each other wasn't always easy.

The moment you resolve to do it, an unforeseen obstacle will inevitably appear. But intentional quality time together matters, so fight for it.



## ***Quality time builds resilience***

Throughout our years of marriage, my wife and I haven't always done this well. There have been times when we've let busyness and general complacency create distance. We've allowed ourselves to get caught up going through the motions of life, and we've neglected each other.

But thanks to the habits of connection we've developed over the years, it usually doesn't take long before we notice the drift and start correcting our course back toward each other.

It's not natural. It takes intentionality. But the prize is worth it: "and they shall become one flesh."





## **10 ideas: Creating Quality Time With Your Kids**

By Dave Klassen with Glen Hoos

This morning I glanced at my schedule for the coming weekend. Four baseball games and two birthday parties dominate the landscape, along with a list of household chores and errands longer than any one man should have to face. And these are supposed to be my days off!

The Bible says that children are a reward from the Lord, and blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them (Psalm 127:3-5). I have certainly found that to be true. But I've also found that the fuller my quiver gets (I've got five beautiful arrows), the harder it is to find the time to give each child the attention they need and deserve. Can you relate? If so, here are 10 things I do to develop my relationships with my kids, in spite of a hectic schedule.

## 1. Road trips.

I take a child on many of the daily errands I run, whether to the dump, to the bookstore, or to the grocery store. I often speak at functions several hours away. If I can afford it and it works, I will take one of my children with me. They love the quality time alone with dad (maybe it's all the fast food we eat?). The time we spend together is invaluable. It's often an adventure both of us never forget, and it's a great chance for me to connect with one of my kids. If you and your spouse feel thousands of miles apart, start with a 1% change.

## 2. Nicknames.

Each of my kids has a nickname that no one else has. We've got a Mouse, a Bear, a Bird and even a Monkey (a few more and we may start a zoo!). These nicknames were given to them as special tokens of my affection. "Anyone can call you by your given name," I say, "but only I can call by your nickname!" I want my children to know that they hold a special place in my life, that I love them uniquely and individually.

## 3. Dates.

I have dates with each of my children. Like my wife, they deserve to have my undivided attention every once in awhile. This is more than just letting them come along as I run errands. I build the time around them, and we plan it together. Usually it's going out for lunch on school days. I'll pick them up—but not without first asking permission from their teacher: "Do you mind if I take my daughter out for a big, unbelievably special lunch?" Then on the way to lunch, I always say the same thing to my child. "The sky's the limit, where do you want to go?" Since we only have a limited time to eat before I need to get them back to school, the sky is most often fairly cost effective.

#### **4. A master's degree.**

I want to know everything about my kids. I've been trying to get a master's degree, majoring in my family. I want to meet their needs as best as I am able. Books like *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman and *The Birth Order Book* by Kevin Lehman have enabled me to better understand how my children learn and grow.

Each is different and unique. I ask them questions like, "What would you do if you had a million dollars?" "If you could choose to have any superpower, what would you choose?" "Of all the sports you play, what is your favorite and why?" You can learn a lot about your kids' values, their dreams, their desires and aspirations by asking questions like these. Questions help me to understand my children, and they enable me to, as the saying goes, "walk a mile in their shoes." It also shows my children that I'm interested in them.

#### **5. Eat together.**

In our home breakfast is chaos, and by lunchtime we are scattered to the four winds. As much as our schedules allow, we try to have dinner together as a family. This is our time to reconnect and recharge after a busy day. It's our chance to celebrate victories, to help each other through the tough things, to do a short devotional, to laugh, to cry, to tell a joke, to hear a story, to sit and feel part of a family.

#### **6. Pray together.**

Prayer is important to me. Whether it's on the way to soccer try-outs, in the car as the ambulance passes us to go to an accident, during the evening before bed, on the way to school or at the supper table, we pray about the past, the present, and the future. We thank God for sending His Son for us, for how He has blessed us and helped us. We pray about their current needs and concerns and that they will remain faithful and strong in their faith. And we pray together for their future occupations and their future spouses, asking God to cause them to grow in faith and purity.



## **7. Family trips.**

I believe a family that plays together, stays together. During the summer we borrow a friend's ski condo (usually no one uses it during that time, and most of the ski resorts are barren). It's a great way to spend quality, uninterrupted time with my kids. When I speak at retreats, I arrange as part of my fee a time when we can come back as a family to enjoy the facilities. Walking around our local lake, riding bikes, hiking, going camping, swimming, going to a museum, to parades, to the July 1st fireworks ... the list is endless. Oh, and by the way, you may be wondering if I enjoy all these activities. Um ... no, not always. But love is sacrificial, and I love my kids.

## **8. Be available.**



Our children need to know that they are important to us. My kids have permission to call me on my cell phone or at work anytime they need to. Sometimes they'll leave messages like, "Hey Dad, I just called to tell you I love you." "Dad! Mom wants you to ..." I find that my best quality time is at night when my kids go to sleep. I'll just lay down next to them and talk about their day.

## **9. Put their activities into your schedule.**

My calendar is filled with my kids' practices, games, school assemblies, and other important events that I don't want to miss. I can't always make it to all of them, but as much as possible I am there to cheer them on. And if I can't be there, I want to be reminded of their big day, so that I can ask them about it later.

## **10. Play their game.**

Each of my children has special interests, and when my time permits, I play their games with them. It may involve playing goalie for hockey, playing Uno or checkers, watching a kids' movie, playing house or tea party or dress-up games, or watching home theatre productions.




The Bible speaks of children as arrows. I picture myself taking aim, pulling back the bow, and launching them into the world. The target that they hit depends in large part on the amount that I invest in them today. I want to help them to become independent and resourceful, to be free to be whom God has gifted them to be, and to inspire them on to greater heights and depths. Does it take effort? You bet—it's like a full-time job!

Do I fail? Many times. But I feel it's like running a marathon with my children: There is a set amount of time that I have with each of my children, and I want to do what I can with the time I have. I don't set lofty goals, compare myself to other more spiritual or more perfect fathers; I just do what I can do and leave the results to God.

Sometimes, the best thing I can do for my kids is to rest: just curl up on the couch and sleep. Without neglecting them, I try to teach them to rely more on their heavenly Father than their earthly one. At times, I need to be in front of them, pulling them to new adventures; other times I'm beside them, walking through the victories and the failures with them; still other times my place is behind them, encouraging them to go for it, to reach out, to draw back their own arrows, and let them fly.

Are there tough choices sometimes? Yes. Is it worth it? Always.



*Looking for more great content for your journey to 500? Check in with us at [FamilyLife.com/500Hours](https://FamilyLife.com/500Hours). We'll be posting content all year long to help you pursue the ones you love the most. And don't forget to enable notifications on the app! Learn more at [FamilyLife.com/App](https://FamilyLife.com/App).*