

Do we get outside enough?



In the mid-1950s, about 45 years before my wife and I were married, an American sociologist named Robert Francis Winch proposed a theory that men and women who were looking for a spouse were generally more drawn to someone whose personality was different from their own. Complementarity, not similarity, was the key to a happy and lasting relationship, he suggested. Winch's work is where we got the term "opposites attract."

While his theory wasn't universally supported, he was dead right when it comes to the relationship in my house. In many ways, my wife and I couldn't be more different.

Take, for instance, our various approaches to making sure our kids peel their eyeballs off of their phones, laptops, tablets, televisions and video games and get outside. My wife – whom I will admit is 100% correct on this matter – is zealous about protecting the kids from themselves regarding screen time, and she is forever pushing them out the door (sometimes quite literally), whereas my opinion is that if the weather is nice and they feel like playing outside, great; if not, that's fine, too.

So, naturally, we had varied reactions to a recent story published at Aleteia.org. The headline read: "[It's a global movement: I'm taking my kids outside for 1,000 hours this year.](#)" The article, written by Theresa Civantos Barber, explores her desire to participate in a new initiative founded by Ginny Yurich, a Michigan mom who strived to get her five kids (ages 12 and under) outside for at least 1,000 hours in a single year. On her website, Yurich explained her motivation:

"Throughout our journey of parenthood, we have consistently

seen city, county, and state parks, as well as trails, campsites, and nature-scapes in general, nearly devoid of children most of the time. About five years ago we started to ask ourselves a simple question: Why? With so much natural beauty all around us ... it seemed counterintuitive that so many outdoor spaces were just empty. With that question of 'why' still unanswered, we did some research and read that striving for a goal of 4-6 hours of outside time within a day (what!?!?) was an ideal amount of time for children to spend, well, outside. This seemed excessive to us and, quite frankly, way too long. ... BUT, we tried it. And you know what? We have not looked back. Our greatest times as a family, and my most successful times mothering, almost exclusively point back to these fully immersive nature days. In time, we began to find that there is benefit upon benefit to this wonderful time outside."

My outdoor-loving wife cheered, of course. My response was more analytical (and more cynical). Almost immediately, I started doing calculations in my head in order to prove that it's almost impossible to spend 1,000 hours outside in a year – especially in a location that has long, dark winters. Some quick division tells me that the kids would have to spend an average of just over 3.5 hours outside on days when the weather is, at minimum, tolerable.

There's just no possible way. Believe me when I tell you (from experience) that my kids can only spend so many hours jumping on the trampoline, or having us push them on the swing, or decorating our driveway with their beautiful chalk art.

But then I think about how much time we spent outside last summer on [our vacation out West](#) – hiking, swimming, eating, chatting around a fire. It really was magical. And while we don't have incredible towering rock formations or awe-inspiring canyons to explore, there is beauty all around us that we haven't yet discovered.

In her article at Aleteia, Barber writes: “Ultimately, I know it’s all right if we don’t meet our 1,000-hours goal. Any effort to spend time in nature will enrich and benefit our lives. Even if we fail at the challenge, we win in gaining delightful memories and huge health benefits of days spent outdoors.”

She’s right. So is my wife (as usual). And so while I might not be a natural naturalist, for the sake of my family, I need to venture out more, experience God’s creation and allow myself – and my kids – to hear his voice whispering in the wind.

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