

INTRODUCTION

If we are going to re-order our lives with healthy rhythms, healthy liturgies of life, then we must come to grips with time. We need to receive God's wisdom on the subject of time. To become truly human and truly ourselves there will need to be a change in some fundamental beliefs and thoughts about time.

Turn with me, in your Bible, to [Ecclesiastes c3](#).

(1. TIME IS A GIFT FROM GOD)

[Ecclesiastes 3:1–8](#).

The point of this poem is that God has created the universe in such a way that everything has a proper time. Keep reading. [Ecclesiastes 3:9–13](#).

Time is God's **gift** to us. That's the first of three fundamental aspects of time according to the Bible. It's God who created time, and it is a gift to us. Jump back to [Genesis 1:3–5](#).

Time is God's invention. When he created the world. Over and over he stopped his work, looked at what he had made, and declared, **"It is good"** ([vv4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25](#)). When God declared, **"It is good,"** he was looking at all that he had made. And this includes time. Time is one of the good gifts that God has given us.

"Time is not our enemy. It is a meeting place, a point of rendezvous with God."¹ "It is within time itself that God meets us."² But we live in a society that has desecrated the God's gift of time.

"Time is the medium in which we do all of our living. [So] when time is desecrated, life is desecrated."³

Transition: So how do we receive and honor time as a gift from the hand of God?

(2. TIME IS STRUCTURED BY GOD)

The answer, it's back in [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#), **"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."**

To receive the gift of time, you must receive it on its own terms. You can't change it. Don't try to change it. You must accept the nature of time. And the nature of time, this gift from God, is that "time is not an undifferentiated quantity."⁴

The second foundational teaching in the Bible with regard to time is that God has stamped time with a structure. Let me show you what I mean.

Think about the poem in [Ecclesiastes c3](#). *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal...”* Look at [v11](#). *“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”*

Do you see, “God is the author of time, **including** its ongoing and...daily rhythms.”⁵

This is such an important issue. Go back to [Genesis 8:22](#), *“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”*

You see, God has given a rhythm to time. Day and night. Weeks. Months. Seasons. Years. “Everyone will admit that the Grand Canyon is more awe-inspiring than a trench. Everyone knows the difference between a worm and an eagle. But how many of us have a similar sense of discretion for the diversity of time?”⁶

Part of our problem is that the invention of the clock has caused us to reduce time to a measurement of intervals. Time has become merely a measuring device. And the result is a profound change in the way we approach time. “The measurement of life [is no longer] in seasons or even weeks and days, but in minutes.” The clocking of time in our culture, has resulted in a “a mechanized **regularity**” which dehumanizes us.⁷

We are wrong to “consider time to be at our disposal, to be organized and scheduled, measured and distributed, invested and spent, as we choose.

According to the Bible...God is the one who controls time throughout our lives. Both the beginning and the end of life are in God’s hands⁸” and the whole point of [Ecclesiastes 3](#) is that **the very rhythm** of time is in God’s hands.

“For everything there is a season...He has made everything beautiful in its time.”

We are so deeply immersed in this clock–culture that it’s very “difficult to change...our attitude.” Our schedules are partly to blame, but the real issue is disposition of our heart. Techniques of time management...can help us,⁹ but we need to learn to see “time through the lens of faith.”¹⁰ We need to begin to think Christianly about time.

The point is that our great need is not to “master the chaos of the day” but to develop the ability to “live **within** each day that is given...to us.”¹¹ We need to learn how to “live in time.”

Now for the third basic aspect of time according to Scripture.

(3. TIME IS HOLY)

Turn back to the beginning of the Bible. While you’re turning there, think about something. “In a well-composed work of art an idea of outstanding importance is not introduced haphazardly,... [instead], like a king at an official ceremony,” when it comes to a great work of art, the important

idea “is presented at a moment and in a way that will” emphasize “its authority and leadership. In the Bible, **words** are employed with exquisite care, particularly those” words that are “like pillars of fire,” the words that are meant to “lead the way” into “the biblical world.

“One of the most distinguished words in the Bible is the word...holy; [it’s] a word which more than any other” leads us into “the mystery and majesty” of God. “Now what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar?

“It is, indeed, a unique occasion” when the very important word ‘holy’ “is used for the first time” in the Bible. It’s “in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation.” **Genesis c2, v1**, “*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.*”

“How extremely significant is the fact that” the first use of the word ‘holy’ is “applied to time: ‘And God blessed the seventh *day* and made it *holy*.’” There is no reference in the record of creation to any [thing else]...endowed with the quality of holiness.

“This is a radical departure from [the] thinking [you find in other religious texts that are written around the time of Genesis.]...[You] would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is *holiness in time*...which comes first.

“When history began, there was only one holiness in the world, holiness in time. When at Sinai the word of God was about to be voiced, a call for holiness in [*humans*] was proclaimed: ‘Thou shalt be unto me a holy people.’ It was only after the people had succumbed to the temptation of worshipping a thing, a golden calf, that the erection of a Tabernacle, of [a holy object] was commanded. The sanctity of time came first, the sanctity of man came second, and the sanctity of [an object] came last.”¹²

And remember, “in the Ten Commandments, the term *holy* is applied to one [thing]... only” time.¹³

God created all the stuff of this universe and says it’s good, it’s good, it’s good. But then he takes a day, and says, it is holy.¹⁴

God has a claim on time. This shows us that time has an ethical dimension, it is holy. That’s the third foundational element with regard to time in the Bible. Number 1, Time is a gift from God. Number 2, Time is structured by God. And number 3, Time is holy.

Transition: So, in order to become the kind of people who can live with a *calmness* of spirit, and *patience*, and *joy*, and *alertness* to what God is doing around us, we must learn to receive time as a gift from God. And central to receiving time as a gift from God is recognizing that God has stamped his creation with a rhythm. And then, instead of ignoring that rhythm and striving against it, we need to yield to the rhythm, and learn how to live our lives according to beat of the Creator.

So what is God’s rhythm? How has God structured time?

For the remainder of this session, we’ll look at the the rhythm God has carved into each day.

1. Embrace the Boundaries of Day and Night

Turn to Genesis 1. Notice v3, *“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’...[end of v5] And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”*

- v6, *“And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters’...[end of v8] And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.”*
- v9, *“And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’...[v13] And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.”*
- v14, *“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night’...[v19] And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.”*
- v20, *“And God said, ‘Let the waters swarm with living creatures’...[v23] And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.”*
- v24, *“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures’...[end of v31] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”*

Can you hear the rhythm? “Evening and morning...evening and morning...evening and morning.” God has structured each day with the boundaries of “evening and morning.”

So, “throughout human history, most people have slept by night and worked by day.”¹⁵

Obviously, these boundaries have always been crossed. Every night “has seen humans keeping watch and hunting, nursing the ill and nursing babies, feeding the fire and setting out the dough to rise.” And then there’s the blurring of the lines when we have parties or emergencies. And “some people just need less sleep than others or need it at different hours.”¹⁶

The problem, we are facing is that modern technology is changing things. The light bulb, the internet, and email, this is all shaping a new pattern of time. These days, time moves to a digital beat that has no regard for the boundaries God has given to a day.

I’m not saying that working days is in any way “morally superior to working nights.” My point is that technology is turning time into a swamp. With laptops and smartphones, life is becoming so portable we are losing all sense of boundary.

Time is “losing its shape.” Technology is not value neutral. It’s giving us “round-the-clock employment, shopping, and entertainment,” but we must count the cost of these new opportunities.

The first piece of biblical wisdom with regard to how we receive each day, is this. The real need isn’t so much about balancing our time (between work and rest and play). The real need is to develop an appropriate rhythm to a day. To receive the day, we need to receive the rhythm of the day as God has put that rhythm into the grain of the universe.

On a very practical level; don't let work life become a swamp, where your work seeps into every corner of your house and every moment of your time. Set boundaries on your work.

I realize this is a challenge that you'll need to address in creative ways. I realize that I live in a very different context than you do. Your job is to figure this out for your context. Here's something that we've done...again, I know this is not an option for the vast majority of you. But just to give you a sense of how we've gone for this issue is that we don't have a computer at home. My work computer is a desktop, not a laptop. I can't bring it home. Now unfortunately, I have an iPhone. So I have to be very disciplined to keep my work life in an appropriate boundary. Again, I'm not talking about emergencies. I'm talking about a pattern of life.

For Janielle, one way we do this, is we don't allow our children to come out of their rooms in the morning until we've turned the hall light on. This helps Janielle to set some boundaries to her work day, as a homemaker. Again, we're not talking about emergencies. We're talking about developing a pattern of life that recognizes boundaries helps us maintain a rhythm. And living in this rhythm is fundamental to going through a day with a calmness of spirit.

This is **Ecclesiastes c3**. *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal...”* And then **v11**. *“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”*

So, my first point here is that God has carved a rhythm of day and night as boundaries into a 24 hour period and we need to learn how to live with that rhythm at the root of our lives.

2. Begin Your Day at Night

For my second point, let's go back to **Genesis 1**.

- **v8**, *And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.”*
- **v13**, *And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.”*
- **v19**, *And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.”*
- **v23**, *And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.”*
- **v31**, *And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”*

For most of us, the day begins when the alarm clock goes off. But here's a different approach. In “the hymn of creation that opens the scriptures” each day begins at dusk.

This simple shift in perspective is of fundamental importance if we are going to receive the day instead of trying to master the day.

“God has given us the daily rhythm” of **sleeping then waking**. Here is grace. Do you see it?

“We go to sleep, and God begins his work...We wake and are called to participate in God’s creative action. We respond in faith, in work. But always grace is previous. Grace is primary. We wake into a world we didn’t make, into a salvation we didn’t earn. Evening: God begins, without our help, his creative day. Morning: God calls us to enjoy and share and develop the work he initiated.”¹⁷

When you understand that the day begins at the “darkening point” you can understand something “important about who we are as human beings.”¹⁸ “Morning becomes a time to *join* in the labors that have already begun without us, and evening a time to let...Another...take over.”¹⁹

You see, at the heart of the Christian approach to time is the steadfast insistence that God “created the earth and separated the light from the darkness....[And, He] is still active in earth...Every day... [He] offers gifts—life, light, and hours in which to work and eat and love and rest—and invites humankind to join in the ongoing work of caring for creation and all who dwell therein...Each day [He continues] the work of new creation: the work of forgiving and reconciling and restoring wholeness. This too we are invited to enter, both as ones who stand in need of this divine work and as partners in it.”²⁰ We are joining him in his work. It’s not on our shoulders.

Forgetting this fundamental truth is a costly mistake. “The blare of the [alarm]...comes to define the starting point of our efforts....[Our] productivity becomes the source of [our]...identity, confirming the superiority of the ‘successful’ to others of ‘inferior’ worth. In the end, our datebooks become the defining templates of our lives, and we actually believe that we have earned the air we breathe. When that happens, not only are we too busy, we are also profoundly mistaken about the true nature of things” thinking that all of this depends on us.²¹

Transition: Alright, there is one more very practical yet profound approach to your day that the Bible offers. It’s a very simple habit that you and I can develop that will help us to put “down stakes in the vast and formless sea of time that is engulfing the world.” This habit is a time–tested, tried–and–true way of developing “a degree of freedom from the control of the clock.”²² But, this habit “requires practice.” To develop it, you must patiently learn a new way of going through your day.²³

It’s called *Fixed Hour Prayer*.

3. Practice Praying at Set Times

Fixed Hour Prayer is when we set aside specific times throughout the day to pay particular attention to God. These moments in time, they are moments when we deliberately lean into the wind of our culture. It’s an incredible way of putting “down an anchor...amid the swells of each day.”²⁴

Let me show you what I’m talking about. Turn in your Bible to

- **Psalm 119:164, “Seven times a day I praise you.”**

- **Psalm 55:17**, *“Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.”*
- **Daniel 6:10**, *“When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.”*

What’s happening here is that the saints of old would mark “the cardinal points of the sun—its rising, zenith, setting, nadir—with communal or personal prayer.”²⁵

Now by the New Testament period, the Jewish people in Palestine seemed to be pulling aside for prayer at 6am, 9am, 12 noon, 3pm, and 6pm.

- In fact, the birth of the church happens at one of these hours of prayer. **Acts 2:15**, *“For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day [9am].”*
- And did you know that the “first detailed miracle of the...Church, the healing of the lame man on the Temple steps...occurred when and where it did because two...Christians...were on their way to” 9am prayers.²⁶ **Acts 3:1**, *“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour [3pm].”*
- And then a few years later, one of the great defining events of Christianity—Peter’s vision of the descending sheet filled with both clean and unclean animals—occur[ed] at noon on a rooftop because he had gone there to observe” noon prayers. **Acts 10:9**, *“The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray [12 noon].”* (Acts 10:3, 30 = 9th hour)

So by the time of Christ, the Jewish people had long been praying at set times and the earliest Christians, who were Jews, continued with this practice. And the historical record of the the 2nd and 3rd centuries, indicates that as Christianity spread beyond the bounds of ethnic Israel, Christians all around the world continued this practice of praying at fixed times.

Now, when it comes to fixed hour prayer, there’s always been great variation. (Prayer at morning, noon, and evening; or 7x a day; or 5x a day.) Morning and evening prayer are nearly always there. Morning because it is the beginning of the day and evening because it is the end of the day. But “each...[Christian] needs to find...a form that fits his or her rhythms.”²⁷ “The distinctive contours of...[your] life make all the difference.”²⁸

I’ve been blessed that my parents introduced me to this incredible gift as a young child.

- teenager, 6am

Many parents are practicing some form of this when they pray with their children each night.

Over the past 4 or 5 years or so, I’ve discovered the riches of adding in noon time and evening prayer.

I can pull aside for fixed hour prayer...It's helped me to remember God throughout the day, to slow down and find some healing from the spiritual illness of hurry and busyness. The way I try to stay in sync is this:

- Morning – first thing in the morning.
- Mid day – 1:30pm. In some sense, this is like the Spanish-style siesta.
- Early Evening – 4:30pm
- and before going to sleep – last thing I read at night is Scripture.

One of the things that I learned [Isaiah 26:3](#) and [30:15](#): *“O God, you will keep in perfect peace those whose mind is fixed on you; for in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be our strength.”* This is what I experience each day, when I go to prayer in the middle and at the end.

What I've discovered is that prayer is home for my soul. “All things have a home: the bee has a hive, the bird has a nest. For the soul, home is where prayer is, and a soul without prayer is a soul without a home.”²⁹

I encourage you to develop the practice of placing your “life beside quiet waters where the Spirit of God can brood upon it.”³⁰ It will help you to keep your life from drifting away on the currents of busyness and urgency. “For most of us the days are not filled with events that we label ‘important.’ The content and quality of our lives is determined by how we respond to the ordinary, and this depends on whether or not we have taken the time to nourish” a deep interior life of prayer.³¹ The more pressed we are for time the more essential it is to drop anchors of silence in our day where we can “be with God in the quiet places of our spirit so that we can come to know a different quality of life.”³²

You see, “remembering to praise God every morning, noon and evening establishes a primal rhythm, as primal as creation.” And this is a powerful source of life for people “whose days might otherwise have little rhythm or sacred routine.” Practice this daily liturgy and you'll discover that grace will fall upon you. You'll discover that “the monotonous, repetitive activity... [does] not place a damper on” your work, “but the opposite.” Your work will begin to flow. It all depends “on a steady, daily routine that by the standards of the busy world look[s] boring, repetitive, and meaningless.”³³

Conclusion

Our need is to learn how to receive time as a gift from God. God created time. And to receive time as a gift from God, we must accept the nature of time as God has designed it. What is the nature of time? Well, that's a very complex question, but we've been looking at one component in the structure of time...the rhythm God has established with time.

And the reason we've been looking at the rhythm of time, is because one of our greatest needs is not so much to find a balance between work and rest and play. A more fundamental need is to learn how to walk in step with God's rhythm.

Living in rhythm with the day is a fundamental step in untangling the fragmented lives we live. Most of us will find it is the most radical thing we've ever done and the most life-giving.

Let's pray.

¹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 11.

² Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 10.

³ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 65), 65.

⁴ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 159.

⁵ Robert Banks, "Time, Use of," in Joel Green, gen. ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 781.

⁶ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath*, Introduction by Susanna Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1951] 2005), 96.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawn, 1969.

⁸ Job 1:21

⁹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 12.

¹⁰ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 12.

¹¹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 41.

¹² Heschel, *Sabbath*, 9–10.

¹³ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 104 n 7.

¹⁴ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 75.

¹⁵ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 28.

¹⁶ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 28.

¹⁷ Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 68.

¹⁸ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 18.

¹⁹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 18.

²⁰ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 18.

²¹ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 19.

²² Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 30.

²³ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 13.

²⁴ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 36–37.

²⁵ Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, [1993] 1998), 36.

²⁶ Phyllis Tickle, "An Introduction to this Manual," *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Springtime: A Manual for Prayer*, compiled and with a preface by Phyllis Tickle (New York: Image Books, 2001), viii.

²⁷ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 36.

²⁸ Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 37.

²⁹ Susannah Heschel, in an interview, speaking about her father's (Abraham Heschel) essay, "On Prayer."

³⁰ O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, 2.

³¹ O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, 18.

³² O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, 17.

³³ Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries*, 24.