



Time & Interruptions

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Humanity is obsessed with time, even to the degree that it has become a commodity. In an essay titled "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One" (21 July 1748), Benjamin Franklin famously stated, "Remember that time is money." Time is a valuable resource (because our experience in this world is finite); thus, it is best to accomplish tasks as soon as possible, in addition to expending time and effort toward worthwhile endeavors. However, in the effort to control and protect "our time," many justify the neurotic management of their time.

Jesus was pleased with the woman, and said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.” Healing the woman was not a task on Jesus’ agenda. Can you relate to such interruptions?

Is it possible to have a false notion of time? The answer is yes, if based upon pride, such as finding enjoyment in one’s busyness since it gives the impression that one is important. Another misguided notion of time is the obsessive devotion to please others, by making too many commitments because the approval of other people is desperately desired. A further dynamic that leads to a fixation with time is the apprehension and discomfort associated with deepening a relationship with God. For instance, prioritizing time in Bible study might cause something to be revealed from the Lord God that needs to change in our lives.

The clock itself stimulates the notion of how very quickly time passes. “The clock,’ [Lewis] Mumford has concluded, ‘is a piece of power machinery whose “product” is seconds and minutes.’ In manufacturing such a product, the clock has the effect of disassociating time from human events and thus nourishes the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences. Moment to moment, it turns out, is not God’s conception, or nature’s. It is man conversing with himself about and through a piece of machinery he created.”

“In Mumford’s great book *Technics and Civilization*, he shows how, beginning in the fourteenth century, the clock made us into time-keepers, and then time-savers, and now time-servers. In the process, we have learned irreverence toward the sun and the seasons, for in a world made up of seconds and minutes, the authority of nature is superseded. Indeed, as Mumford points out, with the invention of the clock, Eternity ceased to serve as the measure and focus of human events. And thus, though few would have imagined the connection, the inexorable ticking of the clock may have had more to do with the weakening of God’s supremacy than all the treaties produced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment; that is to say, the clock introduced a new form of communication between man and God, in which



God appears to have been the loser. Perhaps Moses should have included another Commandment: Thou shalt not make mechanical representations of time” [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin, 1985) 11-12].

We need Scripture to remind us that we can accomplish more by prioritizing time with God—through Bible study and prayer—than we could ever hope to achieve through time apart from Him. When asked his plans for the subsequent day, Martin Luther answered: “Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer” (E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer* [Grand Rapids: CCEL, n.d.] 7).

Considering the nature of interruptions in regard to our priorities is invaluable. In Mark 5, Jesus encountered “a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years.” At the time of the interruption, Jesus had departed with “one of the synagogue officials named Jairus,” whose little daughter was near death. As we say in popular expression, Jesus had “places to go and things to do.”

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the healing authenticated Him as the Messiah. Jesus was accomplishing the work for which He was commissioned. The woman was a distraction, which she knew, and thus thought to just touch Jesus’ garments to be made well. Her belief was superstitious, yet faith nonetheless. Jesus was pleased with the woman, and said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.” Healing the woman was not a task on Jesus’ agenda. Can you relate to such interruptions? My day, week, and month (even months in advance) is planned. Inevitably, someone or something tends to interfere with my plans.

How should we respond to bothersome interruptions? First, remember that God is the Lord of interruptions. In Acts 16, Paul, Silas, and Timothy were attempting to reach Bithynia, yet “the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.” We may rightly assume the experience to be an interruption. Later, in Acts 27, Paul was shipwrecked while sailing for Rome (a journey that began with an unplanned arrest in Jerusalem). There was one interruption after another.

Scripture reveals how God “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11). Whatever we may think God is accomplishing in our lives, it is most certainly not an interruption to Him. We can never have God at our disposal to help further our own agendas. The book of James reminds us, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’” (4:13-15). Adopting the biblical principle will allow us to overlook the irritation and regard the

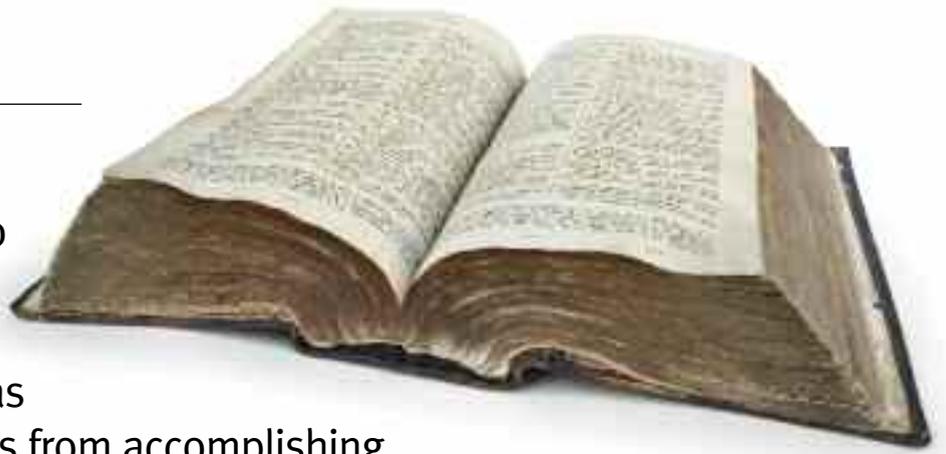
interruption with gratitude. Ephesians 5:20 affirms the truth that believers ought to be “always giving thanks for all things.”

Interruptions to our schedules may lead to wonderful opportunities for serving God, yet just as easily could prevent us from accomplishing the Lord’s will. God promises wisdom in His Word—the Holy Bible—to discern what must be accomplished and what should be avoided. The biblical perspective corrects us from the modern notion that we have an image to defend. “The Hebrews, however, were a very passionate people; they did not hide or suppress their emotions. The Hebrews—both men and women—were able to affirm their full humanity. They gave vent unashamedly to their feelings, for each emotion had ‘a time’ appropriate for its expression: being angry, crying, laughing, singing, feasting, dancing, hand clapping, shouting, embracing, and loving (see Eccl. 3:1-8)” [Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 139].

Ecclesiastes 3 demonstrates the need to be more liberated to embrace the reality that everything has an appropriate time. One may work diligently, yet avoid the neurotic obsessions of the present time. Verses 1-15 indicate how it appears that God has a predetermined time for everything to occur, yet why this is true remains an enigma. The presence of evil in the world, in addition to pain and suffering, can be quite difficult to explain sometimes, especially when discussing a God of compassion and love. In many respects, it is much easier to understand Satan, the devil, than to comprehend God. The reason is that Satan—in a sense—is rather simplistic because he is a being of absolute evil, and thus the motivations for his actions are readily understood (cf. John 8:44).

God, however, is more difficult to understand (Job 36:26; 38:4-42:6; Eccl 8:17; Rom 11:33), and it is especially challenging to comprehend the Lord’s

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actions in momentary experiences. God is omnibenevolent (all-good) and omnipotent (all-powerful); thus, one questions why there is so much pain and suffering in the world. The defense of God's goodness and omnipotence, in consideration of the existence of evil (theodicy), is addressed in Ecclesiastes 3.

Scripture asserts that however one attempts to resolve the truth that God is good and evil is a reality, no one can answer by claiming that the Lord is not sovereign. Verses 1-8 of Ecclesiastes 3 affirm that God has a purpose from which He does not deviate. The Lord has made "an appointed time for everything" (v. 1).

God is not some cosmic Santa Claus, nor does He cooperate with humanity as one always thinks He should. In C. S. Lewis' allegory, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, he depicted Aslan as a Christ type figure. Mr. Beaver first tells Susan, "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." The next statement is famous from the second volume in the series. In response to Lucy's question whether Aslan is "safe," Mr. Beaver replied, "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe [tame]. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you" (C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* [1950; reprint, New York: HarperTrophy, 1994] 86).

Once we realize that God is not tame, our natural response is to ask, "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" (v. 9). Scripture asserts that God has made "everything appropriate in its time" (vv. 10-11; cf. Ps 37:23).

Although we may yearn to know God's eternal plans, it is impossible. How do we live in a world that is beyond our control?

First, we are not to become disillusioned; rather, we should devote ourselves to giving thanks, doing good, and seeing good in all our labor (vv. 12-13). To perceive good in our efforts "is the gift of God," as we are reminded that nothing can be accomplished without the supernatural enabling of God. The Lord is redeeming all things, including the souls of humanity, and also our work. Everything that God accomplishes is eternally significant (v. 15).

Ecclesiastes 3:16 notes the inequity of life. "Under the sun" there will be injustice and wickedness, yet God's people may take comfort that, in His divinely appointed time, the Lord will judge all people (vv. 17-18; cf. 8:8-9; 12:13-14). God's patience is the reason why all people do not experience His immediate judgment (2 Pet 3:8-9). God will bring beauty from all that occurs (Isa 61:1-7; Rom 8:28). God "set eternity" in the hearts of humanity (Eccl 3:11), and, in Christ Jesus, one may receive eternal life (1 John 5:9-13).

We ought to rejoice in our present activities, because it is what God has ordained. The uncertainty of the future is resolute motivation for enjoying life in the present. Many of us have developed a false notion of time, and do not entirely experience the present. We should all appreciate life as it comes, especially in view of eternity. Avoid being "pressed for time," and recapture the moral and spiritual benefits of the Holy Bible.

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