

TIME FOR THE KINGDOM

THE KINGDOM ECONOMY 2



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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A REVISION STUDY

Time for the Kingdom
The Kingdom Economy Part 2
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Welcome to *Time for the Kingdom*

Welcome to *Time for the Kingdom*, a study examining God's purpose in granting us the gift of time in these last days. *Time for the Kingdom* is part 2 of a 10-part series on *The Kingdom Economy*. The purpose of this series is to outline the dramatic difference living in Christ's Kingdom can make in our lives, societies, and cultures, and to provide practical guidance for making Christ's agenda our own.

Time is the one commodity every follower of Christ has in equal measure. The time of our lives comes to us new each moment, granted as a gift from God, and intended for the purposes of His Kingdom economy. Our time is not really ours; it's God's time, invested in us for the purpose of carrying out our Kingdom-and-glory calling in every area of our lives (1 Thess. 2.12).

We must not take time for granted or we will waste, squander, or misuse it. Time is like the talents given to each servant in Jesus' parable (Matt. 25.14-30). God gives each of us every moment, and He is looking for a return of glory on this most precious and bountiful gift. In this series we're going to consider the teaching of God's Word concerning how to make the best use of the time of our lives so that the Kingdom economy of God continues to expand and advance in these last days.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to subscribe to our free instructional newsletters, including *ReVision*, *Scriptorium*, and *The Week*, and *Crosfjgell*, featuring insights from Scripture and our Celtic Christian forebears.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Time of Our Lives

“So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.” Matthew 25.28, 29

Enough time?

People never seem to have enough time to do everything they want to do.

“Where does the time go?” we ask, as if somehow the moments of our lives slip away without our noticing.

“I just don’t have the time!” is the complaint we hear from many when challenged to a more demanding life of discipleship and service in the Kingdom of God.

“What time is it?” Here’s a question we should ponder beyond the momentary investigation it seeks. For these are the last days. The Kingdom economy is expanding and going forward, and all who believe in Jesus, all who have made the Kingdom turn, are called to seek the Kingdom and glory of God at every moment. Thus the answer to this question must ever be, “Time for the Kingdom of God.”

Of course, it’s true that we all have just exactly the same amount of time. But if I understand the parable of the talents correctly, it may actually be possible to gain *more* time than others, or at least, to make better use of the time available to us. But this means understanding the *purpose* of time and the *intentions* of Him Who grants it to us moment by moment.

The parable of the talents

The parable of the talents (Matt. 25.14-30) relates the familiar story of three servants entrusted with unequal amounts of their master’s wealth and charged with the duty of making more of it. Two succeed, while one squanders the opportunity by timidly hiding his talent rather than investing it for his master’s benefit.

At the end of the parable, the master chides the unfaithful servant, and takes his amount of money from him and gives it to the one who made the best use of the money entrusted to him. Thus, the parable ends with Jesus explaining, “to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance.”

Jonathan Edwards, that great Puritan preacher and theologian, explained that of all the gifts God gives to His people, excepting that of salvation, the gift of time is the most precious. Everything we are and do takes place in time. Each of us has just as much time as all the rest of us – 24 hours in every day. But some people seem actually to have *more* time than others, which is apparent by what they are able to accomplish with the time they have.

The gift of time

I worked one summer with a master builder and craftsman named Ernie Daniels. Ernie loved the Lord and always did all his work as unto the Lord. He knew every tool and its proper use, and there wasn’t a construction or repair task that Ernie had not accomplished at some point in his career.

One day Ernie had several tasks to take care of, which he felt he could accomplish on his own. So he gave me one task to do – reverse a wrongly-installed door knob and lock in a hotel door. When I’d finished that, he said, I could spend the rest of the day cleaning up the workshop.

Simple enough, I thought.

Except that I'd never done this task before and, once I got the door knob apart, I could not, for the life of me, figure out how to get it back on correctly. It took me nearly the entire morning to complete this simple task! I felt the pressure of time slipping away from me, knowing that Ernie expected me to wrap this up quickly so that I could use the rest of my time getting the workshop in order.

By the time I finally got back to the workshop, Ernie was already there and had cleaned the whole place up without me. He graciously laughed at my ineptitude and assured me it was OK. Ernie understood that I was not trained to use my time in this kind of work, and so it made sense that, since he was, and was vastly more experienced in such tasks than I, he would get more out of his time than I would.

Following Jesus Christ is just like this – except that believers do not have the excuse of saying, like I did to Ernie, “This just isn’t what I do well.” All believers are called to follow Jesus Christ, all the time of their lives, and to devote all their time to growing in Him and bearing fruit for His Kingdom. The gift of time has always been precious, but in these last days, the time of our lives is the arena in which the Kingdom economy must advance.

As Paul put it, believers in Jesus Christ must learn to *redeem* the time allotted to us for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom. Any time not wholly invested in seeking the Kingdom and glory of Jesus Christ will be lost to the forces of wickedness and unbelief (Eph. 5.15-17).

We will be hard pressed to make any lasting contribution to the Kingdom economy until we understand and learn to make the best use of the gift of time, according to our King’s purposes in granting it to us.

The time of our lives is a gift from God, which He bestows on us, moment by moment, so that we will use it for His glory and Kingdom. Our calling is to receive and master the use of this gift. God’s promise is that, if we will, we will never lack for time to grow in the Lord or to further the purposes of His Kingdom.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you think it’s appropriate to apply the parable of the talents to the time of our lives? Why or why not?
2. When the Lord returns and comes to inspect the time of our lives, what will He be looking to see?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17. Why does Paul say *the* time instead of *your* time?

Next steps – Preparation: Are you making the best use of the time God gives you? How do you approach the time of your life? Do you evaluate your use of time in any way? Should you? How good are you at planning your time? [Click here](#) to download our free brochure, “The Time of Your Life,” and spend a week discovering how you spend God’s precious gift.

2 Not Our Own

*The day is Yours, the night also is Yours;
You have prepared the light and the sun.
You have set all the borders of the earth;
You have made summer and winter.* Psalm 74:16, 17

Never knew what they had

We are living in the last days, the fullness of times in which God is advancing a new administration of things on earth. His economy – the Kingdom economy – is bringing to every area of life and all creation a power to restore what was lost in humankind’s fall into sin. He has called and redeemed a people for Himself, and has appointed them the high privilege of seeking and advancing His Kingdom economy in all the time of their lives.

For many of us, thinking about time as a gift from God, given moment by moment anew, will be something of a revelation. We all have the same amount of time, but perhaps we’ve never realized just how precious these fleeting moments are.

Susie and I sometimes enjoy watching “Antiques Road Show” on our local PBS station. I’m always amazed at the knowledge of the appraisers, their understanding of the provenance and peculiar details and beauty of the item they’re considering.

I may look at a cabinet, for example, and think it’s interesting or even beautiful, but I’m sure I wouldn’t know why, or whether my judgment was reliable beyond an expression of my own taste.

But what I particularly enjoy about this program is watching the faces of people who learn, through the detailed explanations given by their appraiser, that this old piece of junk they’ve stacked books on for years is really a precious and quite valuable artifact. They never knew what they had, because they didn’t understand what it was.

However, the resolve of every one of them, from that moment on, is to treat this discovered treasure with the respect it deserves.

What is time?

The time of our lives is like that. We take our time for granted, which is not to say that we don’t value it. We do, and we try to use it well for all the things we consider to be most important.

But I suspect that most of us don’t think of time as a precious gift from God, bestowed by our Creator, one moment at a time, for a particular use and purpose in line with His advancing Kingdom economy. For most of us, time is just something out there, something everybody has, that we use up as the moments pass for whatever matters most to us at the moment, in the confident belief that we’ll always have more time to do more of the same.

But what is time, really? Can you go down to the local grocery and purchase a box of it? Can you swap some of your time with a friend so that you get better time, or, at least, time you consider to be more valuable?

And what about the time you had yesterday? Where is it? And the time for tomorrow? Why are we so certain it will be here when we need it?

Time is not only a gift of God, it is a *creation* of His as well. God does not exist within time; He is eternal and does not experience anything like the succession of moments we know as time. God made time and He gives time to His creatures, one moment at a time, every day of our lives.

Time exists somehow within God (Acts 17.27, 28) and is dependent, like everything else, upon His upholding Word (Heb. 1.3). Time is not ours, but God's, and He reserves the right to determine what constitutes the best use of His most precious gift.

Measuring time

We measure time, from the human perspective, in various ways – seconds, minutes, days, weeks, months, years, and so forth. But these are not true quantitative measurements of some material quantity – like a half gallon jug measures a certain amount of milk. Our measures of time are more on the order of estimates (as we think of the future), experiences (with respect to the present), and records (as we think about the time that is gone by).

All time comes from the Word of God (Jn. 1.1-3), is sustained by the Word of God (Heb. 1.3), and returns – like the talents in Jesus' parable – to its Creator and true Owner (Rom. 11.34-36). There is as yet no future time, and the time we've used up is gone forever; we cannot return to it. Every moment of your time comes fresh from the Word of God, and returns immediately to Him for His review.

The only time we ever have is the present moment, and each of those is supplied for us, as an act of free grace, by the eternal God and His Word.

Our King has a precious purpose in mind for the time He gives us – that we might know Him, enjoy His blessings, express His glory, and demonstrate His love. For the most part, however, the human race squanders the time God gives them for merely personal and pragmatic ends.

So what about us, we who profess to have made the Kingdom turn and think of ourselves as followers and servants of King Jesus?

Our time is not our own, just as we who know Jesus Christ are not our own (1 Cor. 6.19, 20). What we hardly think of as more than passing moments for temporal endeavors, God creates and bestows as investments of eternal glory, to be used and enjoyed as creatures destined to live with Him forever.

For reflection or discussion

1. Many people waste a good bit of the time allotted them each week. In your own experience, what are some of the more common "time-wasters" that you'll need to confront?
2. "All time comes from the Word of God (Jn. 1.1-3), is sustained by the Word of God (Heb. 1.3), and returns – like the talents in Jesus' parable – to its Creator and true Owner (Rom. 11.34-36)." Do you think most Christians understand the significance of this statement? Why or why not?
3. What is God's purpose for the time of our lives? How might we begin to know that purpose more clearly?

Next steps – Transformation: Here's a challenge for you. Review the way you spent the time allotted to you yesterday. What percentage of that time was consciously spent and consciously invested for Jesus our King and His glory? What can you do to begin improving that percentage? Ask a church leader or pastor for some suggestions.

3 Time for the Kingdom

For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:16

The mind of Christ

In these last days our Lord Jesus Christ has established a beachhead for His Kingdom in those who believe in Him, and in their churches. In, through, and from them He is advancing a new administration of things on earth, as it is in heaven – the Kingdom economy. He sends the time of our lives, moment by moment afresh, like reinforcements and materiel, to strengthen our position and fit us for each day’s advance.

Our calling is to make the best use of our time for the Kingdom and glory of our Lord.

In order to make the best use of the time of our lives we need to learn to see our time through the mind of Him Who creates, bestows, and upholds it. What does God intend in giving us this most precious gift?

We may protest, “But who can know the mind of the Lord?”

However, Paul reminds us that, if we are believers in Jesus Christ we *have* the mind of Christ, the very Word of God, the same Word Who is creating and bestowing and upholding all the time of our lives. We have the mind of Christ! And all who have this mind are determined to push forward, advance, and bear fruit for the Kingdom and glory of our King (Phil. 3.10-14).

But if the mind of Christ in us is like an antique stored in the attic – treasured, but seldom used – it won’t do us much good. We must daily receive and be renewed in the mind of Christ if we want to understand the world – and time – as Jesus does (Rom. 12.1, 2; Eph. 4.17-24).

Time as Jesus sees it

How does Jesus Christ see the time He gives us each moment of our lives? What is His purpose in giving us this great gift? We want to be good servants and stewards of our time, so that we return to the Lord, Who gives us time, an investment of glory and progress in the Kingdom economy. The better we understand what Jesus intends in giving us the time of our lives, the better we will be able to make good use of it according to His purposes and will.

According to Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15 – echoing Psalm 110 – Jesus Christ is presently employed at the right hand of God the Father working to augment, improve, and advance His rule on earth as it is in heaven. He is developing, expanding, and advancing the economy or administration which He launched on the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2).

He sends out His Word to uphold the cosmos, gives His Spirit to bring new life to those who believe the Gospel, endows His followers with gifts and fruit, calls them to particular places of service, sends His angels to guard and assist them in their endeavors, and puts His enemies under His feet as He builds His Church and thereby fills the world with His presence (Eph. 1.15-23).

So it must be the case that, in giving us each successive moment of time, Jesus intends us to receive and use our time according to *His* purposes in seeking and advancing *His* Kingdom. He has told us that seeking His Kingdom and righteousness is to be the defining priority of our lives (Matt. 6.33), and this would include the way we use our time.

Time for the Kingdom!

When we thus see our time through the mind of Christ, we understand that time is a resource for seeking and advancing the rule of Jesus Christ on earth as it is in heaven, so that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit increase and abound in and through us, filling up all the time of our lives with love for God and our neighbors.

We are making the most of the time Jesus gives us when the time of our lives is invested in establishing and enlarging the footprint of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

No moments are given to us for any purpose other than seeking the Kingdom of God. This does not mean that every moment of our lives must be given over to doing “church work.” Since Christ is Lord of all – every aspect of human life and interest – we are using our time best when, whatever we are doing (1 Cor. 10.31), we’re employing it to further the presence of His Kingdom.

Even if all we’re doing is eating and drinking, or relaxing and enjoying a moment of well-deserved rest, we can do so in such a way as to refract the reality of the Kingdom of God into the ordinary events of everyday life.

But this doesn’t just happen. In order to live out the mind of Christ in the time of our lives we need to study the Word of Christ, thinking through everything He teaches us in His Word, so that we are able to take every thought and every moment captive for King Jesus and make our thoughts and time obey His good and perfect purposes (2 Cor. 10.3-5).

These are the last days. God’s Kingdom economy is advancing on earth, and we are called to seek it, every moment of our lives. Are we up to so high and holy a calling? Well, what better employment could you find for the time of your life?

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to say that we have “the mind of Christ”? What are some of the implications of this for how we *think* about the time of our lives?
2. What in heaven is Jesus *doing in our time* right now? Does this suggest any guidelines for us in thinking about how to make the most of the time of our lives?
3. Meditate on Romans 14.17, 18 and Matthew 6.33. What is the Kingdom of God, and what is the nature of our relationship to that Kingdom?

Next steps – Preparation: What is your approach to seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God? How much of your time does this involve each day? What are you doing with the rest of the time? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.

4 Paying Attention to Time

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.15, 16

Kingdom time?

Most of us would be surprised, I think, to discover how much of the precious gift of time we invest in activities other than seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God.

One reason this happens is that we have never learned how to prosecute our daily lives from a Kingdom vantage point. The work we do, our relationships at home, taking care of the everyday business of staying healthy and managing our affairs – for many believers, indeed, perhaps most, these are not typically looked upon as Kingdom activities. All these concerns fall somewhere outside the bounds of the Kingdom economy – perhaps in the getting-and-spending economy of our secular and materialistic age.

Do we even consider whether the Kingdom of God has anything to do with how I do my work, take care of my yard, converse with my friends, or use my free time? That is “non-Kingdom” time for most believers, with the result that hours and hours of time each week, given to us by the Lord for the purposes of advancing His Kingdom, are simply lost to merely temporal and fleeting ends.

“Kingdom time” is, for most of us, *church* time, when I’m with my Christian friends doing my Christian thing.

Here there is a need, if we are to make the best use of our time for the Kingdom of God, for more focused study in Scripture, in order to understand how the mind of Christ teaches us to approach our daily tasks and activities for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

The Bible is given to teach and equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). Every work appointed to, every expenditure of energy we undertake each day, should be a good work, a work in line with the Kingdom economy of God. Paul instructs us to conduct every aspect of our lives as unto the Lord, rather than to men – even, merely, ourselves (Col. 3.23, 24). But we’ll never understand or begin to practice this teaching – and thus, we will continue to squander Kingdom time on fleeting activities – until we give ourselves diligently and continuously to the task of learning how the Christian worldview shapes our thoughts and practices in every area of life, all the work we’ve been given to do in these last days.

Kingdom time all the time

A second reason we waste so much time is that we don’t follow Paul’s command to *walk circumspectly* concerning how we use our time each day. For the most part, we don’t pay the kind of attention to the Lord’s gift of time as the Lord does.

Paul says we must not use our time like unwise people, people who have no regard for how the wisdom of God or seeking the Kingdom plays out in the time of our lives. They who are unwise rarely think about God and His will; they have their own ideas about how to use their time (Prov. 14.12). As believers in Christ and citizens in His Kingdom, we are called to live as wise people, trusting in the Lord with all our hearts and in *all our ways* acknowledging His Lordship over our lives and time (Prov. 3.5, 6; Eph. 5.17).

So we need to develop a means of paying close attention to how we use our time, in order both to live wisely in the time of our lives, and to be sure in our own hearts that we have made the most of the moments granted us for the work that is before us each day.

I used to teach a time management course for businessmen, and one of the activities I required of them, early on in the course, was to keep track of how they used their time in 30-minute blocks for a week. I gave them a card marked off in seven daily segments, each divided into 30-minute blocks, and instructed them to write down their activities as they completed them each day. Then, at the end of the day, I told them to tally up the wasted time from each day.

Typically, my students would scoff at the idea that they wasted any time. They were busy people, forward thinkers, men of focused action! They didn't waste time!

Except, as it turned out, they did. Hours and hours of it, every week. Amazing what a little circumspection might reveal about the time of your life.

Track your time

We're no different from them. It might be an interesting activity for you to track your time in 30-minute blocks for a week or so, to pay attention to whether you're living as a wise person, using your time for the progress of the Kingdom, or like the unwise person, frittering away God's precious gift.

You might be surprised – or chagrined – at what you discover.

We have to do something to determine where the time of our lives is going. And we need to keep this up continually. Time is too precious a gift, and it is given for too specific a purpose, for us who know the Lord not to make the best use of all our time for the glory of Christ and the progress of His Kingdom.

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to “prosecute our lives from a Kingdom vantage point”? What are some of the obstacles we have to overcome in order to do this?
2. What would you suggest as a workable practice for paying more careful attention to the way you use the time of your life each day? Would it help you to improve the use of your time if you were accountable to someone for the way you use time? Why or why not?
3. What warning does Paul include in Ephesians 5.15-17 concerning the way we use our time? If we don't use our time consciously and carefully for the Lord and His Kingdom, what could happen to the time of our lives?

Next steps – Preparation: Are you up to the challenge posed above? [Download our free worksheet, “The Time of Your Life,”](#) and take a look at how you are using God's precious gift. Share your results with a friend.

Prayer:

5 Kingdom Coming

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matthew 6:33

Every moment for the King

Since, as we have seen, the Lord Jesus grants us the time of our lives for the purpose of augmenting, improving, and expanding His rule on earth as it is in heaven, we do well to take His command about seeking the Kingdom into every area of our lives. The time of our lives in these last days is God’s gift to equip and enable us to know, love, enjoy, and serve Him, and to advance His economy on earth as it is in heaven.

We are making the most of the time of our lives when we are using every moment of it on the King’s business, devoting ourselves to the progress of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit as our overarching framework for life, and loving God and our neighbors in everything we do (Rom. 14.17, 18; Matt. 22.34-40).

The better we understand and the more consistent we become in practicing the Kingship of Jesus and in seeking His Kingdom, the better use we will make of the time of our lives in bringing glory and honor to the Lord.

Know the King

Seeking the Kingdom means preparing and growing and living in such a way as to experience and express the reality of Christ’s rule in every area of our lives.

This requires, in the first place, that we maintain a *vibrant and fruitful relationship with the Lord* of the Kingdom Himself.

Peter commands us to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ so that we encounter Him in His glory through the various disciplines He has provided (2 Pet. 3.18; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). We cannot expect to have much success in advancing the rule of Christ if we do not *know* the Lord well enough to understand how He would have us *use* the time of our lives for His honor and glory. The paltry spiritual life that characterizes many professing Christians will keep them from making the most of the time of their lives for the Lord, for the simple reason that their relationship with Him is not as deep and vibrant as it should be.

The Kingdom visible

The Kingdom of God, that reign of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, comes to expression in our lives through the various relationships, roles, and responsibilities in which we engage each day. Thus, the more mindful we are about these, and the better we prepare for each and the more attentive and diligent we are in conducting them, the greater will be the likelihood that what we are learning about Christ and His Kingdom will become visible in all the work we’re given to do each day.

When our own lives become filled with Jesus and His Word, He will overflow from us to fill all aspects of our lives with Himself (Jn. 7.37-39). But we must be filled with Him through the disciplines of Word, prayer, meditation, solitude, and obedience. Then the hope in which we stand will grow, such that it becomes visible to others in all the time of our lives (Rom. 5.1, 2; 1 Pet. 3.15).

The agent of the Kingdom

Finally, we seek the Kingdom of God when we are involved in the work of making disciples and building the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28.18-20).

The Church is the agent of the Kingdom – a sign of its presence and the outpost of its advance. Local churches broker the grace and truth of the Kingdom to the world, through the lives and ministries of faithful disciples and witnesses of Jesus Christ. Each of us is called to participate in the great work of making disciples and bearing witness for Christ; using our time with others to encourage, instruct, and assist them in knowing the Lord and growing in Him; and joining with other disciples to carry out the various works of ministry that build up the local community of believers in unity and maturity (Eph. 4.11-16).

Making disciples is not the calling of pastors alone. Jesus expects all His subjects to be actively involved in this great work. Similarly, each of us has unique gifts and opportunities for ministering to others, and we must be faithful stewards of these, identifying, developing, improving, and using them as the Lord leads us day by day (1 Pet. 4.10, 11; 1 Cor. 4.1, 2).

When we are seeking the Kingdom of God in these ways – growing in the Lord, doing His work in all our work and other activities, and making disciples and building His Church – we will be making the best possible use of the time entrusted to us by the Lord. Then we can expect to generate a return on Christ’s investment that brings honor and glory to the Lord and the blessings of peace to those around us.

Thus the time that flows to us, pristine and purposeful, will flow back to Christ, adorned with grace and glory, and bringing Him honor and praise.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you think it’s possible to live every moment of our lives for the righteousness, peace, and joy of the King and His Kingdom? In love for God and our neighbors? Why or why not?
2. What are some ways we should expect the Kingdom of God to “become visible” in or through our lives?
3. Do the Christians you know think of their lives as “refracting” the light of Christ and His Kingdom into “whatever they do” (1 Cor. 10.31)? Why or why not?

Next steps – Transformation: How would you evaluate yourself in each of the three areas of Kingdom-seeking mentioned in this study? What can you do to improve and become more consistent in each of these? Share your thoughts with a church leader or pastor, and ask for help or guidance in making better use of the time allotted to you.

6 Strength for the Journey

*Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion.* Psalm 84:5-7

The journey of faith

In these last days, we spend the time of our lives on a journey toward a better tomorrow and our heavenly home. We “walk” toward more of the King, “run our race” with patience, our eyes fixed on Jesus, and follow the “Way” He has marked out for us. The mature believer knows he must not be content merely to “stand still” in his walk; he must “press on” toward the upward prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus in every area and moment of his life (Phil. 3:10-14).

In his sermon, “The Christian Pilgrim,” Jonathan Edwards elaborated the idea of the Christian life as a journey. There is an end to the journey, and they travel most efficiently who keep that end in sight, so as not to become distracted along the way. We are travelers, pilgrims, and we must neither dawdle nor delay in making progress toward the vision of Christ and His Kingdom.

This message of Edwards dovetails nicely with his sermon on “The Preciousness of Time” and provides a framework for thinking about the life of faith that can help us in making the most of the time of our lives.

The idea of the life of faith as a journey has solid Biblical roots, for example, in Psalm 84. In this psalm the sons of Korah anticipated the preaching of Jonathan Edwards by teaching us how to look at our lives in the Kingdom of God so that we don’t squander our time but use it as God intends.

The psalm begins with a joyous exclamation concerning the destination of our journey: the courts of the living God (vv. 1, 2). The place where God dwells is exceedingly lovely, so much so that the psalmists’ souls longed and even fainted to be there with the Lord in His glory. The vision of that great, eternal destination filled the psalmists with joy and led them to sing to the Lord with all their strength, and to turn even the hardships in their journey into opportunities for growth and progress.

What vision?

What vision guides us in this life?

Television commercials, devoted as they are to the economy of getting-and-spending, can give us the idea that, of course, everyone is longing and fainting to be one of the beautiful people, to smell nice and look good, own a new car, eat at chic establishments, use the latest credit card, and enjoy a prosperous and entertaining retirement. If this is the commanding vision of our lives, the way we use our time will be determined by what we hope to realize or achieve, where we want to go.

If our vision, however, is that we are pilgrims journeying to eternal glory, we might expect our time to be employed somewhat differently.

Psalm 84 envisions the journey of life as a kind of “living sacrifice,” not unlike the way Paul describes our lives in Romans 12.1, 2 (cf. Ps. 84.3, 4). Every day we offer ourselves up like birds on an altar, offering our lives and time to the Lord, so that our lives, in all their facets, may be pleasing to God, because they are lived in a manner agreeable to His Kingdom purposes.

Such a view of life comports well with Jesus’ instruction to take up our cross daily and follow Him in works of self-denial and self-giving (Matt. 16.24, 25).

Drawing on the strength of the Lord

But in order to live this way we will need to draw on the strength of the Lord (Ps. 84.5). The “highways” that lead to eternal Zion can be difficult to travel. Temptations and trials arise; we experience hardships and opposition; and it can be difficult to keep the vision of our destination in mind.

Indeed, our journey in life can often feel more like a Vale of Tears than Happy Valley (v. 6). But, knowing that we’re on a journey to eternal glory, that we have devoted ourselves to serve the living God, and that we journey every moment in the strength of His Word and Spirit, we turn our trials to rejoicing and our setbacks to renewal, using our time to “go from strength to strength” (v. 7) as we prepare to appear before the Lord at the end of our lives (cf. 2 Pet. 3.11-14).

So we hang our lives on prayer (v. 8) and shield ourselves under the Word of the Lord (v. 9; cf. Ps. 12), as we strain to improve our vision of and progress towards the heavenly courts of the Lord (v. 10).

Every day we walk according to the good and upright Law of the Lord (v. 11; cf. Rom. 7.12), in the light of Christ’s resurrection and the promise of blessing He holds out to us (vv. 11, 12). Such a framework or template for living each day fills our lives with anticipation, rejoicing, strength, and hope – a hope which can become visible and infectious to those around us (1 Pet. 3.15).

Seeing our lives this way, as pilgrims on a journey to eternal glory and bliss, can help us in making the most of the time of our lives, as we invest each moment for the glory of God and His Kingdom in these last days.

For reflection or discussion

1. Many Christians over the centuries have used the image of a “journey” to describe the life of faith. Do you think this is a good way of thinking about our lives? Why or why not?
2. What does it mean to be a “living sacrifice” in the time of your life?
3. How would you counsel a new Christian to “draw on the strength of the Lord”?

Next steps – Conversation: As you think of your life as a journey toward eternal glory, what would be some of the highlights of your journey thus far? Share your answer with a Christian friend, and invite your friend to share his or her highlights as well.

7 Three Disciplines

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.* Psalm 90.12

Time and our journey

We began this look at the time of our lives by considering the gift of time, and seeing ourselves as stewards of this gift, called to invest it in such a way as to return glory and honor to God with all the time of our lives.

When we see our lives from the vantage point of Jesus Christ, exalted in glory and furthering His Kingdom economy on earth as it is in heaven, this helps us to understand better what we're supposed to be doing with our time. Seeking the Kingdom of God with *all* our time, in *all* our work is our highest priority, so we need to gain an understanding both of how we are using our time in the present, and how we can improve the use of our time.

Living each day within the framework of our lives as a journey toward eternal glory can help us to grow in the Lord, draw on His strength, live sacrificially for others, and do the good works for which we have been redeemed by the Lord (Eph. 2.8-10).

Putting it all together

But how do we put this all together?

Practically speaking, how can we get into a rhythm of making the most of our time each day, so that, at the end of each day, we can have the satisfaction of knowing that the labors of that day – all the ways we have used our time – have not been in vain (1 Cor. 15.58)? Let me suggest three disciplines for an ongoing process that can help us to be good and faithful servants of God because we are good stewards of His most precious gift of time.

First, put in place some system for *continuous planning*.

If, as Moses prayed, we can “number” our days – and all the moments of them – *before* we get to them, we'll be more likely to use them for the purposes of the Kingdom than if we just wait around for the next moment to show up and see what it brings. Christians, as we've seen, must live toward the future, arranging the days of their lives in patterns that foreshadow, anticipate, and actually make visible the Kingdom and glory to which we are called and toward which we are journeying.

By planning our lives carefully, thinking through in advance how we want to live the days of our lives, we'll have more success in making the most of our time, because we will have accounted for the *use* of this most precious gift *before* we actually begin to unwrap it.

Second, learn to *live within an envelope of prayer*, so that you are continuously in communication with the living God.

Let Psalm 139.23, 24 guide you here: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if *there is* any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.” If this simple prayer can become the attitude of our hearts throughout the day, we'll be open to however the Lord may want to convict, correct, or co-opt our time for the purposes of His Kingdom.

Taking a few moments at different times of the day, just to pray this prayer and listen for the Lord's prompting, can help to make this prayer an attitude in which you continuously pursue your journey with the Lord in the time of your life.

Finally, *partner with a few soul friends* who love you, know how you're trying to live your life, and will provide prayer, encouragement, and accountability for every step of your journey. These should be people who will take seriously the command to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Heb. 10.24). As you meet with your soul friends for prayer, sharing, strategizing, and growth, you'll find such companionship to be an invaluable resource to help you in your journey with the Lord.

The time of your life

The time of your life that remains to you, whether the days be many or few, can be a glorious, joyous, hope-filled adventure of living for Christ and His Kingdom in these last days. The time of your life can be, well, the time of your life, full of meaning, and fruitful living for the Lord.

But you'll need to take seriously the challenge of stewardship which God has laid upon you by bestowing His most precious gift of time into your care.

For reflection or discussion

1. How much, and in what specific ways, do the three disciplines outlined here factor in your use of the time of your life?
2. "The time of your life can be, well, the time of your life, full of meaning, and fruitful living for the Lord." For you, personally, what are some of the keys for making this true of all the time of your life?
3. Suggest some ways that Christians can help one another do a better job of making the most of the time God gives them:

Next steps – Preparation: Planning, prayer, and partners: Are these three disciplines for making the most of the time in place in your life? How might you add or strengthen each of these for your journey in the Lord? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.

Prayer:

For reflection or discussion

1. How do Christians see time differently from others? Why?
2. Why has God given us time? How does the time of our lives relate to God's purposes in the divine economy? Is *Kingdom* time *merely* the time we spend in "Christian" activities? Or at church? Or is *all* our time *Kingdom* time, time for the Kingdom of God? Explain.
3. How would you assess your present use of the time of your life against the backdrop of God's purposes? Can you see any areas where you might improve?
4. Why is it helpful to think of the Christian life as a kind of journey? To what are we journeying? What difference does it make in the time of our lives to think this way? What disciplines can guide and sustain us as we make this journey?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about the time of your life? How are you planning to put that lesson to work in your life?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.