

GUARDIAN OF TIME

PURIFYING THE CONSCIENCE 6

A purified conscience leads to redeemed time.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Guardian of Time
Purifying the Conscience 6
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Contents

Welcome to <i>Guardian of Time</i>	4
1 The Precious Gift	5
2 All Time is God's Time	7
3 Time and the Kingdom !	9
4 Redeeming Time	11
5 In Time, as in Heaven	13
6 Pilgrim Life	15
7 Plan, Pray, Partner	17
Questions for Reflection of Discussion	19

Welcome to *Guardian of Time*

The wisdom of God, which the conscience generates out of our thoughts and affections, plays out in the time of our lives. Paul calls us to make the best use of the time given us, so that we may live like wise people, rather than like unwise.

This makes the conscience the guardian of our time, that aspect of the soul which, so to speak, has the last word on how we use the time entrusted to us. We need to understand time, and see it as the precious gift it is, so that we can purify our conscience toward redeeming the time of our lives for our Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord.

In this study we will consider some practical ways of getting our conscience in shape for the right and best use of our time, so that in all the moments of our lives we may glorify God in our words and deeds.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Precious Gift

“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?

Priorities, values, wisdom, words, and deeds – the business of the conscience. All have this much in common: They come to expression in time. Time is the arena in which the decisions of the will, those mysterious siftings of mind, heart, and conscience, play out in our lives. Time is more precious than we know, and it is a primary role of the conscience to keep watch over our time, so that we make the best possible use of it.

Our generation never seems to have enough time to do everything we 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.

Of course, it’s true that we all have the same amount of time. But if I understand the parable of the talents correctly, it may be possible to gain *more* of the available time for pursuing the things that matter most in life. A purified conscience will be a diligent guardian of the time of our lives.

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 gives his amount of money to the one who made the best use of that which he had been given. Thus, the parable ends with Jesus saying, “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.”

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 that 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 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 loved doing 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 – and then told me to 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 afternoon to complete this simple

task!

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. As our consciences become purified with His priorities, values, and wisdom, we will find that more of our time is being devoted to our Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord.

As Paul put it, believers in Jesus Christ must learn to make the most of the time for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom, for 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).

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, which we do by purifying our conscience as guardian of this most precious gift. God promises 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

1. Do you have a means for organizing and evaluating your time? Should you?
2. How can you tell when your time is being used for the Kingdom and glory of our Lord, and when it isn’t?
3. How would you explain the idea of “making the most of the time” to a new believer?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a Christian friend about these questions, then agree to read and discuss the remaining installments in this series.

2 All Time is God's Time

*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

Susie and I 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, and their advice about conserving and insuring these precious treasures.

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, with a specific use and purpose in mind. We have not tuned our consciences to serve as guardians of time, so that we make the best use of every moment for our Kingdom-and-glory calling. For us, time is just something out there, something everybody has, that we use up as the moments pass for whatever matters most, 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? The question of time has captured the attention of physicists, cosmologists, philosophers, poets, and theologians from time immemorial.

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 makes 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). God defines the nature of time and its proper use, and as we are being formed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, *concern* for the right use of time will feature large in our daily lives.

Measuring time

We measure time, from the human perspective, in various ways – seconds, minutes, days, weeks, months,

Guardian of Time

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.

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

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. And He has set the conscience in the soul to guard this precious treasure and see that it is properly employed.

For reflection

1. What does someone mean who says, “I’m just wasting time”? Is time the sort of thing we ought to *waste*?
2. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 6.19, 20 and Ephesians 5.15-17. If all time is *God’s* time, and you belong to Him, what does this suggest about how you ought to *guard* the time entrusted to you each day?
3. Is it possible to remain mindful, throughout the day, that our time is a gift from God, to be used for His purposes? How would you suggest doing that?

Next steps – Preparation: 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?

3 Time and 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

To make the best use of the time of our lives, we need to see our time through the mind of Him Who creates, bestows, and upholds it. A sound mind where time is concerned will help us to nurture a reliable conscience as guardian of that time. 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!

But if the mind of Christ in us is like one of those misunderstood antiques— interesting, but unappreciated — 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? How does He think about how we should use His time? 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 Kingdom progress. 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. Time to Jesus is the arena for Kingdom progress and flourishing.

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 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 thus fills the world with His presence (Eph. 1.15-23).

So it must be the case that, in giving us successive moments 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. When the Kingdom and glory of God are the highest *value* in our conscience, how we use our time will reflect that value in everything we do.

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.

We are making the most of the time (Eph. 5.15-17) Jesus gives us, when the time of our lives is invested in establishing and enlarging the footprint of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Guardian of Time

There are no moments in our lives that 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 we’re employing it to further the presence of His Kingdom, regardless of what we may be doing.

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 (1 Cor. 10.31; Mk. 6.34).

But this doesn’t just happen. 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 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). Thus the mind readies the conscience for its important function as guardian of the time of our lives.

As we become more conscientious of the time of our lives, we can expect to feel assured or convicted in our souls about the use we make of our time, as our conscience directs us by the Word of the Lord into the wisdom of God (Rom. 2.14, 15).

For reflection

1. What does it mean to have the mind of Christ? How would you suggest encouraging a fellow believer to make better use of the mind of Christ?
2. Can we expect our conscience to function as guardian of our time if we are not thinking with the mind of Christ? Explain.
3. What is your approach to improving your use and awareness of the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Conversation: 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 Redeeming the 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?

Did you notice that Paul did not write *your* time, but *the* time. *The* time is always *God's* time, entrusted to us as a precious gift and treasure, for furthering His Kingdom-and-glory purposes in our lives. 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 conduct 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.

Some might think the Kingdom of God has nothing much to say about 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, as others tend to think of it, is *church* time, when I'm with my Christian friends doing my Christian thing. This is the time I devote to the Kingdom of God. The rest of my time is dedicated to the kingdom of me.

Conversely, if we are to make the best use of time for the Kingdom of God, we need more focused study in Scripture, 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). It instructs us how 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 waste 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 practice in every area of life.

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.

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. 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).

Such stewardship of time doesn't just happen. We need to develop a way to pay 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 each day.

I used to teach a time management course for seminary students, and one of the activities I required of them, early on in the course, was to keep track of how they used their time. I gave them a card marked off in seven

Guardian of Time

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, people of focused action! They didn't waste time!

Except, as it turned out, they did. Hours and hours of it, every week.

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 "walk circumspectly," looking carefully at each block of time to determine whether you're living as a wise person, using your time for the progress of the Kingdom, or unwisely.

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

We must do something to determine where the time of our lives is going. By setting aside time for planning and review, and by thinking more carefully about how we use our time, we allow our conscience to guard the time of our lives in line with its Kingdom values, priorities, and wisdom. 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

1. How do you organize your time? Do you plan each day? Do you do a daily review?
2. What about in the moment of time: How do you remain conscious of your Kingdom-and-glory calling, so that you use all your time to this end?
3. How can believers help one another to be better stewards of the time of our lives?

Next steps – Preparation: Are you up to the challenge posed above? Keep track of your time in 30-minute segments for one day. Evaluate each activity you write down with a 1 to 10 (10 being the highest) rating, assessing how the time of your life was used for the Kingdom of God. Pray about what you learn, asking the Lord to help you be a better steward of His time.

5 In Time, as in Heaven

“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 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. In heaven, perfect righteousness, peace, and joy obtain, because the Lord is there, and all those He has thus far gathered unto Himself. This is what He intends for the time of our lives as well.

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 (Rom. 14.17, 18). It is the role of the conscience to guard our time for these ends.

The better we understand and the more consistent we are 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, growing, and living to experience and express the reality of Christ’s rule in every area of our lives – every area, every moment, all for His glory and Kingdom.

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 in the time of our lives, if we do not *know* the Lord well enough to understand how He would have us *use* our time 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, 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 our time at work, our conversations and relationships with others, and the various cultural activities of our lives.

Thus the Kingdom of God comes in the time of our lives, bringing the fragrance and flavor of heaven into everything we do.

Kingdom agent and outpost

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, as well as its *outpost*, brokering God’s grace and truth 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

Guardian of Time

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. 4.1-16). One way to make sure your time is being used for the Kingdom of God is to devote *some* of your time to the work of helping your own local congregation grow as the Body of Christ.

Making disciples is not the calling of pastors alone. Jesus expects all His subjects to be actively involved in this great work (Matt. 28.18-20). Similarly, each of us has unique gifts and opportunities for ministering to others, and we must be faithful stewards of these 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, and we can expect a return on our investment that brings honor and glory to Christ, and the blessings of the Kingdom 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

1. Why is it so important that believers grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ? How can they do that?
2. What do we mean by saying that the local church is the agent and outpost of the Kingdom? How does serving in our church help us in using our time according to the mind of Christ?
3. What are some observations that would signal to you that the rule of King Jesus was coming into *your* time as it exists before His throne in heaven?

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

6 Pilgrim Life

*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 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 redeeming 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’ soul longs and even faints to be there with the Lord in His glory. The vision of that great, eternal destination fills the psalmists with joy and leads them to sing to the Lord with all their strength and to turn even the hardships in their journey to opportunities for growth and progress.

What vision?

Which begs the question: What vision guides us in this life?

Television commercials can give us the idea that, of course, everyone is longing and fainting to be one of the beautiful people, to own a new car, and to enjoy a prosperous and entertaining retirement. Such happiness is related to material things and pleasant circumstances, and we are bombarded by this message daily, from advertising, pop culture, education, politicians, the media, and more. If this is the commanding vision of our life, the way we use our time will be determined by what we hope to become or achieve, where we want to go.

If our vision, however, is that we are pilgrims journeying to eternal glory, along a path that is fraught with sacrifice, suffering, and tears, 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, 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. Every day we take up our cross and prepare for a day of self-denial, sacrifice, and giving for the sake of others, as Jesus taught (Matt. 16.24, 25).

Drawing on the strength of the Lord

Guardian of Time

But to live this way, we will need to draw on the strength of the Lord (v. 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. As we purify our consciences from every material burden, doubt, or fear, taking up the values and priorities of Christ and His Kingdom, we may expect to travel this life in the wisdom and righteousness of the Lord, knowing His peace and joy in every situation.

For reflection

1. Do you find that the idea of life as a journey describes your own walk with the Lord? Explain.
2. Why should we expect this journey to take us through a valley of tears? How can we prepare ourselves – mind, heart, and conscience – for such daily cross-bearing?
3. The end of our journey is the joy that was set down before our Lord Jesus (Heb. 12.1, 2). How would you describe that joy to one just beginning this journey? How do you experience this joy each day?

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 Plan, Pray, Partner

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom...
Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90.12, 16, 17*

Time and our journey

We began this series 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. Only as we work daily to purify our consciences from worldly concerns, and to establish in it those Kingdom values and priorities that engender righteousness and wisdom, will be ready to redeem each moment of time for the progress of God's Kingdom and the manifestation of His glory.

When we see our lives from the vantage point of Jesus Christ, exalted in glory and furthering His Kingdom on earth – in time – as it is in heaven, we understand better what we're supposed to be doing with our time. Seeking the Kingdom of God with *all* our time 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 in pursuing the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in *all* the time of our lives.

Living each day as pilgrims, seeing 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).

But how do we put this all together?

Putting it all together

Practically speaking, how can we get into a rhythm of redeeming and 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 our conscience, and all our soul, is guarding our time for His Kingdom and glory.

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

As Moses prayed, we should *number* our days – and all the moments of them – before we get to them. We should budget our time like we budget our money, accounting for each moment before the time comes for us to spend it. Thus we'll be more likely to use our time 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 make visible the eternal glory toward which we are journeying.

By planning our day carefully, thinking through in advance how we want to live for the Kingdom and glory of God, 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 begin to unwrap it.

Guardian of Time

Second, learn to *live within an envelope of prayer*, so that you are continuously in communication with the living God, seeking His guidance for all the work before you each day.

In addition to Psalm 90.12, 16, and 17, let Psalm 139.23, 24 guide you here. Moment by moment, call upon the Lord to check your thoughts, renew your heart, and purify your conscience for the journey. Listen as He engages your conscience to *confirm* your thoughts, feelings, and actions, or to *convict* you of areas where change is needed. 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 how we use our time for the purposes of His Kingdom.

Taking a few moments at different times of the day, to pray Psalm 139.23, 24, 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 know how you're trying to live your life, and will provide prayer, encouragement, and accountability for every step of your journey. Begin with your spouse, and look for other 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. 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. And this means purifying your conscience of everything that might distract, obstruct, or divert you from diligently pursuing your Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord.

For reflection

1. What is your present approach to redeeming the time God gives you each day? Can you see any ways to improve this?
2. How would planning, prayer, and partnering with a soul friend benefit your approach to redeeming the time of your life?
3. Explain how having a purified conscience relates to making the best use of the time of our lives.

Next steps – Transformation: Planning, prayer, and partners: Are these three disciplines 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.

Guardian of Time

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why should we think of time as a precious gift from God?
2. What is the relationship between conscience and how we use our time? How does having the mind of Christ and the heart of God's Spirit help us in purifying our conscience for better use of our time?
3. What do we mean by saying that the Kingdom of God comes *in time* just as it is in heaven? How does this happen in your life?
4. How can thinking about our lives as a journey help us in redeeming the time God gives us each day?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about how purifying our conscience relates to using our time as God intends? How are you implementing that lesson in your daily life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.