



Engaging God's Gift of Time

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Abstract

Time is often viewed as a commodity. We “have” time. We “spend” time. As a result, we most often see time as limited. We cannot find time. We need more time. But time is not a commodity. God gifts us with time and we discern—wisely or not—how to engage it. This article explores how conceptions of time are culturally constructed, and examines theological and scriptural perspectives on time, to posit a practical theology for how Christian leaders can receive the gift of time given by God and discern how to engage time as God intends.

Keywords

Time, God, culture, pastoral theology

Time is often viewed as a commodity. We “have” time. We “make” time. We “spend” time. We learn to “tell time,” often wishing that we could tell time to move slower or faster. In viewing time as a commodity, we most often see it as limited. We do not have enough time. We cannot find time. We need more time.

But time is not a commodity. We cannot control time. We really cannot even manage time. God gifts us with time and we make decisions—wisely or not—about how to engage

it. God gifts us with the time necessary to be who God calls us to be. According to Marshall Cook, “If we say that we don’t have enough time, we’re saying that God didn’t give us enough. We’re implying that [God’s] gift is inadequate and, further, that [God’s] plan for us must be wrong” (Cook 2009, 21).¹ Yet God’s gift of time is not freely given as God desires for us to engage time in accordance with God’s will.

If time is not a commodity but a gift, and it is God’s will to provide us with ample time to fulfil our calling, what does it mean to live in right relationship with time? How can “time management” be an act of discernment? This article explores how conceptions of time are culturally constructed, and examines theological and scriptural perspectives on time, to posit a practical theology for how Christian leaders can receive the gift of time given by God and discern how to engage time as God intends.

I pause here to state explicitly, but briefly, that my perspectives on time are influenced by my social locations. I am a White female, born and raised in the United States, where time is often commodified and timekeeping is sanctified. My family of origin was steeped in the Protestant work ethic, which meant that “working hard” was valued and “hard work” required attempting to control time. Through study and discernment, my current spiritual and theological understandings of time oppose these cultural constructions, yet the following perspectives on time are undoubtedly biased by my context and upbringing.

An Introduction to Time

There is no monolithic definition of time. Time cannot be touched, tasted, seen, or heard, yet we feel its effects. Understandings of time differ across the disciplines. Historians, biologists, psychologists, mathematicians,

¹ Cook, Marshall J. 2009. *Time Management: A Catholic Approach*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

theologians, and others do not define time in the same way, nor are their conceptions of the past, present, and future synonymous. Even the Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers fourteen distinctive definitions of time. Generally speaking, however, time is understood as 1) a duration—a measurable period during which something exists or occurs; 2) an occasion—a point at which an event occurs; 3) a moment in chronology that is indicated by a watch or a calendar; 4) an age or time period; or 5) a season.²

As previously stated, time is not a commodity, and commodifying time poses both practical and spiritual dangers. The practical danger of commodifying time is that we engage time and make plans based on the assumption that time is ours to “spend.” If I believe I will live into my nineties, I may plan to work until I’m seventy and therefore forego taking “time away” from work to engage in other fulfilling endeavours. Conversely, if I believe there is not enough time in a day to accomplish what I need to, I may run around in a frenzy and forget half the tasks that seemed so imperative. Commodifying time also poses spiritual implications as it tempts us to turn time into a false idol, being enslaved or beholden to it. In making a false idol of time, I may govern my day by the numbers on my watch, my clock, or my cell phone and make important decisions based not upon my values but based upon the pressure I perceive time to be exerting upon me.

Yet “the very pressure of time is an illusion” because we only have the present (p.15).³ We cannot live in the past or in the future, yet it can be challenging to live in the present. We long for past eras when there was “more time” and life was simpler. We get anxious about the future, fretting about where we are headed or what the outcome will be. As spiritual teacher Easwaran bemoaned, “We are a one-third people”

² Merriam-Webster. 2018. “Time.” Accessed January 5. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/time>

³ Easwaran, Eknath. 2005. “All the Time There Is.” *Natural Life* 102: 12-15.

(2005, 13). We spend one-third of our time thinking of the past, one-third thinking about the future, and only one-third in the present. By living our lives as one-third people, we fail to see the fullness of time as it is already manifest in the here and now. “Time and again, we miss out on the great treasures in our lives because we are so restless. In our minds we are always elsewhere. We are seldom in the place where we stand and in the time, that is now. Many people are haunted by the past, things that they have not done, things that they should have done that they regret not doing. They are prisoners of their past. Other people are haunted by the future; they are anxious and worried about what is coming” (p. 191).⁴ Truly we can only live in the present, yet we become ensnared in trying to live out the past or the present.

As will be evidenced below, time is far less linear and limited than we oftentimes assume. New age spiritual wisdom posits that time is expansive. From this perspective, time expands to meet our needs because God orders time. As Christian ethicist and theologian Stanley Hauerwas stated in an interview with Andrew P. Klager, “God became time with Christ, which means that we have all the time in the world to do what’s necessary” (2014, para. 8).⁵ God calls us into existence for a reason, gifts us with the time to fulfil that calling, and lures us toward stewarding our time in accordance with God’s will. Yet it is difficult to become time with Christ. Relating to time as created and ordered by God is challenging because we most often view time as a cultural, rather than a Divine, construction.

Time and Culture

Although time was and is created by God, our

⁴ O’Donohue, John. 1997. *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. New York: HarperCollins.

⁵ Klager, Andrew P. 2014. “The Vulnerability That Makes Peace Possible: An Interview with Stanley Hauerwas.” *Huffington Post*. Accessed July 14. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-p-klager-phd/the-vulnerability-that-ma_b_5579366.html

conceptions of time are culturally constructed and culturally bound. Our understandings and habits of time are influenced by our family cultures, our employment cultures, our racial/ethnic and geographic cultures, etc. Consider, for example, the alternative way St. Benedict engaged time in his Rule, written around 530 CE as a guide for monks to engage in the communal life and endeavour toward union of the soul with God.⁶ Benedict sought to outline a means of fraternal living that regulated time in a manner that “it might have theological significance” (p.115).⁷ Benedict advocated for an alternative rhythm of the day wherein the length of an hour varied, and the time of spiritual practices shifted, based upon the fluctuating hours of daylight and night. Not all hours were sixty minutes, and not all days were twenty-four hours. Although Benedictine monks are credited with creating clocks, they did not do so in order “to capture discrete, abstract units of time that could be extrapolated from the particularities of any given situation and used for the glory of human beings” (p. 27).⁸ Rather, they created clocks to pace the events of the day, the spiritual practices that grounded their relationship with God. Benedict’s conception of time was theologically grounded, yet it was culturally constructed to fit with and facilitate the monastic way of life.

Or imagine, for example, that you were living in 1582 when Pope Gregory XIII introduced what is now known as the Gregorian calendar. This calendar refined the traditionally employed Julian calendar to assure that Easter was celebrated in the season or time established by the early Church. The Gregorian calendar corrected the length of the calendar year by 0.002%, but not all countries adopted the

⁶ Parry, O.S.B., David. 1980. *Households of God: The Rule of St. Benedict, with Explanations for Monks and Lay-People Today*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.

⁷ Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton, and Francis Ward. 2005. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM Press.

⁸ Swinton, John. 2016. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

calendar at the same time. For example, it was not until 1752 that England first officially adopted the Gregorian calendar, requiring the country to “lose” eleven days. “When folks went to bed, it was September 2, but when they woke up, it was September 14” (p. 2).⁹

Cultural constructions of time are used to help peoples, like the Benedictines, but also to oppress individuals and groups whose conceptions of time differ. For example, Western and European conceptions of time were forced upon the colonized, indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas. The different way of engaging time in such cultures resulted in the native peoples being considered lazy or unproductive. The European or Western clock became the standard, and “the colonized were placed in a position of Otherness based on their perceived ‘temporal weakness’” (p. 32).¹⁰ Cultural constructions of time are used to marginalize Others including citizens of two-thirds world countries, individuals with mental and physical disabilities, and people who attempt to live outside the hegemonic, neoliberal Capitalist agenda wherein time = productivity = money = worth.

Cultural constructions of time can be oppressive and lead us to believe we have less time, but they can also be liberating and facilitate the belief that we have more time. Consider the invitation Henri Nouwen received upon arriving in Cork, Ireland, in the midst of chaotic a travel itinerary during his “sabbatical” year, and just one month prior to his death. As evidenced in his journal account, Nouwen was summoned by the way time in Ireland invited him to slow down: “Cork, Wednesday, August 21: Every time I am in Ireland, I am struck with the different rhythm of life. Because of my jet lag, I decided to ‘sleep in’ until 9:00 am. But when I arrived at the breakfast table at 9:30, I was one of the first!

⁹ Cook, Marshall J. 2009. *Time Management: A Catholic Approach*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

¹⁰ Swinton, John. 2016. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

No hurry, no urgencies. As they say in Ireland, ‘God created time and He created plenty of it’” (p. 215).¹¹

The culture of time among children also encourages the belief that time is abundant. Children, for example, often view time as expansive and immeasurable rather than linear and limited. Most children have not yet become “a one-third people” (p. 13).¹² They live in the present, far less concerned about the past or the future than most adults. In their hours of play, most children are not anxious that bedtime will come. Most children are fully present in the “what is” as opposed to focusing on the “what was” or “what will be.” According to Frederick Buechner, children’s way of relating to time is more focused on quality than quantity, and is therefore closer to Godly time. “Childhood’s time is Adam and Eve’s time before they left the garden for good and from that time on divided everything into before and after. It is the time before God told them that the day would come when they would surely die with the result that from that point on they made clocks and calendars for counting their time out like money and never again lived through a day of their lives without being haunted somewhere in the depths of them by the knowledge that each day brought them closer to the end of their lives” (p. 10).¹³

The risk of viewing time as a cultural construction is that we may be tempted to romanticize past cultural constructions of time. As we struggle to accomplish our ever-expanding to-do lists, we may find ourselves longing for a lost golden age, a time in the past, when people purportedly had less pressure and experienced fewer demands on their time.

11 Nouwen, Henri J. M. 1998. *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company.

12 Easwaran, Eknath. 2005. “All the Time There Is.” *Natural Life* 102: 12-15. Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton, and Francis Ward. 2005. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM Press.

13 Buechner, Frederick. 1982. *The Sacred Journey*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers.

We look back with longing to a period that, I would argue, never actually existed. Think, for example, about agrarian societies and how time was structured when the hours of daylight continuously shortened in approach of the winter solstice, and yet the chores were exactly the same as the day before. Did those farmers not experience the pressures of limited time? In order to learn to relate better to time as God's time, not culture's time, we are aided in uncovering theological and scriptural wisdom about time.

Theology of Time

For millennia, theologians have pondered God's involvement with time. In most classical theologies, God is considered timeless, eternal, and therefore beyond time. God exists outside the progression of time and views time from a meta or transcendent perspective. In such perspectives, God is like the great playwright who knows the script beforehand and knows how the actors will play it out. God, in God's eternity, sees all time. Moreover, some classical theologies view God as the great puppeteer who, by God's omnipotence, not only knows the script but is able to make edits and rewrites, to change stage directions, while the play is unfolding. Aquinas supported this perspective by advocating that God relates to time as one stationed high above on a hill, or in a tower, watching a caravan of travellers *en route*. God knows all that will occur in the course of time, and past, present, and future are all present to God at once.

Others, however, have viewed these classical theologies as inadequate. For example, in his *Confessions*, Augustine examined how, if God is eternal and timeless, God participates and acts within time. For Augustine, God's timeless nature did not mean God is atemporal. In contrast to his contemporaries, Augustine argued that time did not exist prior to Creation. "God created the world not *in* time but *with* time" (Swinton 2016, 58).¹⁴

¹⁴ Swinton, John. 2016. *Becoming Friends of Time: Dis-*

Yoder (2002)¹⁵ offered key correctives to Augustine's theology and suggested that God is not timeless but timefull. This panentheistic perspective of God purports that God is "in time but not of time," a divine simultaneity (p. 60).¹⁶ Such a conception of God aligns nicely with process theology and affirms that "God is *timeless* in that time does not determine God; God does not occur *in* time. Still, one can say that God is *timeful* in that whatever time is, time occurs *in* God" (p. 49).¹⁷ Within this perspective the future is yet to be determined, and God co-creates that future with creation.

Scriptural Perspectives on Time

In addition to classical and contemporary theological perspectives on time, Christian scriptures help to elucidate how Christian leaders can understand and relate to time. The New Testament employed two different Greek words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. Chronos is chronological time; it is sequential. Chronos is quantitative and refers to an amount of time. According to theologian Paul Tillich, chronos is "formal time" (p. 38).¹⁸ Alternatively, *kairos* is an opportune time; it is a season. *Kairos* is qualitative; "it measures moments, not seconds" (para. 3).¹⁹ According to Tillich, *kairos* is "'the right time,' the moment rich in content and significance"

ability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship. Waco: Baylor University Press.

¹⁵ Yoder, John H. 2002. *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

¹⁶ Swinton, John. 2016. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

¹⁷ Tran, Jonathan. 2010. *The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory: Time and Eternity in the Far Country*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁸ Tillich, Paul. 1951. *The Protestant Era*. Translated by James Luther Adams. London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd.

¹⁹ Valentine, McKinley. 2018. "Chronos & Kairos." Accessed January 8. <https://mckinleyvalentine.com/kairos/>

(p. 38).²⁰ God gifts us with *chronos*, a quantity of time, but also *kairos*, a quality of time. “Our lives, too, are made up of *chronos* and *kairos* moments. The *chronos* times of our lives are the events that happen to us. The *kairos* moments are the defining moments in our lives, the moments of new insight, of deeper understanding—moments when everything changes. *Kairos* times are the times in our lives when we can see the hand of God at work” (p. 27).²¹ God gifts us with both *chronos* and *kairos* time. In the Hebrew Scriptures, greater emphasis is placed on *kairos* time, the fullness of time or the completion of an event, rather than on the *chronos* of time or chronology. Specific scriptural passages from both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament offer insights into the nature of time, God’s relation to time, and how God calls humanity to relate to time.

The Nature of Time

Although many Christians in the West believe time is linear, with an emphasis on the “beginning” and the “end times,” this perspective was arguably derived from philosophical influences. Christian scriptures present an alternate understanding. According to Ecclesiastes 1:9, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.” In this perspective, time clearly has a circular nature. The emphasis is not on what has or will occur in a linear or chronological conception of time, but about the season for and the fulfilment of events. “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). God’s existence both within and beyond

²⁰ Tillich, Paul. 1951. *The Protestant Era*. Translated by James Luther Adams. London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd.

²¹ Thurston, Bonnie. 1999. *To Everything a Season: A Spirituality of Time*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

time is made more comprehensible when time is understood as both circular and linear. According to 2 Peter 3:8, "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day." God's time does not exist solely in a linear manner. God's time is linear and circular.

God's Relation to Time

As written in Genesis 1:14, "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.'" As previously noted, God's creative work occurred with time and not in time. And God is not limited by time. "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4). Psalm 90:2 reminds us how God is both in time and beyond time: "You have always been God—long before the birth of the mountains, even before you created the earth and the world."

Moreover, because, from the perspective of process theology, we share power with God, God gives us enough time to fulfil our calling. That is God's will for us and God lures us toward that fulfilment of time. God's gift of time is not freely given, however, because God desires for us to engage time in particular ways. Yet the free will of humanity, both our own actions and those of others, can limit our time and cause us to engage time in a manner distinct from God's will. As stated in Ecclesiastes 7:17, "Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?" When creation acts out of alignment with God's will, the consequence may be that time is not fulfilled or we do not have ample time, which is God-given, to complete our calling.

How God Calls Humanity to Relate to Time

As previously noted, humanity co-creates with God the future, and creation and time are not within our control.

As was written in James 4:13-15, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.’ Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.’” When we view time as a gift from God and the future as a co-creation, it becomes apparent that one cannot form plans into the future without recognizing that the future is uncertain. Only after discerning God’s lure and God’s will for our futures can we look to the future as a co-creation.

Given that we cannot control time or our futures, the sacred Christian texts are replete with guidance for engaging time in accordance with God’s will by being good stewards of time. “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34).

Discerning How We Engage Time

This article is not intended to offer step-by-step guidance on time management. Those seeking such direction can turn to *First Things First* by Stephen R. Covey or *Time Management: A Catholic Approach* by Marshall J. Cook.²² Rather, this practical theology outlines how one can discern God’s time to determine how God calls one to act within it.

The above exploration into time, with scriptural and theological insights, evidences how time is not a commodity, but a gift from God. The pressure of time is an illusion

²² Cook, Marshall J. 2009. *Time Management: A Catholic Approach*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

and reveals the way humanity's engagement with time is culturally influenced. Rather, God gifts all individuals with enough time to fulfil their calling. Time is not linear, as it so often is conceived to be when we live as a one-third people, stuck in the past or the future rather than the present. Moreover, God is both within and beyond time. Humanity engages generatively with God and time when individuals discern how God is calling them to engage time and participate in the co-creation of the future. Discerning how to engage time can be done through both reflection and spiritual discipline. What follows below is guidance toward this end, yet these questions and practices are not the only means of discernment. Rather, they are a starting point for those who wish to redirect their engagement with time and those who seek to recommit to engaging time in a Divinely-inspired, rather than culturally constructed, manner.

Discernment through Reflection

Based upon the insights posited above, how can one discern God's desires for their engagement with time? Being a Christian leader requires modelling for others a God-centred way of being with and in time. Discerning how to engage God's time is aided by reflecting on three critical questions about one's relationship with time as well as observing distinctive spiritual practices. The first step is to reflect and gain self-awareness on three key questions: 1) does the way I engage time cultivate greater love?; 2) am I engaging time or attempting to commodify or control it?; and 3) am I trying to move faster than God into the future?

The first litmus test for discerning how God may be calling us toward a changed relationship with time is to reflect on how our engagement with time generates greater love. The greatest commandment, our mission on earth, is to love God and love our neighbour. This is our ultimate call. The preoccupation and distraction that so often result from attempts to control time can hinder and impede love. Therefore, if you are unsure of the ways that you engage

time cultivate greater love of God and neighbour, you need to reflect critically on when and how you do fulfil the commandment and when and how you do not. This insight can then be taken to God in prayer or incorporated within one of the spiritual practices described below.

The second question focuses on whether or not you are engaging time or attempting to commodify or control it. Over-managing time in such a way prevents one from being present to time and present to the moment.²³ In his book *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring the Sabbath*, Mark Buchanan recounted the wisdom shared by Henri Nouwen toward the end of his life: “My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted ... until I discovered the interruptions were my work” (quoted in Buchanan 2006, 44).²⁴ Relating to time as a commodity, rather than a gift from God, means trying to control it. This results in abhorring interruptions or changes in schedule as these events jeopardize one’s sense of controlling the clock and one’s life. Controlling time by living highly regimented lives with discrete times for God, time for ourselves, and time for renewal, or by fearing interruptions, is not how God calls us to engage time. God calls you to be mindful and present to interruptions, to see them as your work, lest you place the clock as an idol above God.

The third question elicits reflection on whether or not we are living as a present tense people. This is considered by asking yourself, am I moving too fast into the future? “Living spiritually demands that we be ‘present tense’ people—a distinctly countercultural idea” (p. 43).²⁵ When we

²³ Buchanan, Mark. 2006. “Schedule, Interrupted: Discovering God’s Time-Management Technique.” *Christianity Today* 50 (2): 42-45.

²⁴ Buchanan, Mark. 2006. “Schedule, Interrupted: Discovering God’s Time-Management Technique.” *Christianity Today* 50 (2): 42-45.

²⁵ Thurston, Bonnie. 1999. *To Everything a Season: A Spirituality of Time*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

forego living as a present tense people, we often move too quickly into the future, anxiously thinking about what's next on the to-do list or fretting about what's to come. In his book *Becoming Friends of Time*, John Swinton explained how Jesus walked slowly. Walking in love means walking slowly. Attempting to walk into the future faster than Jesus cannot possibly be following God. Walking fast is not "bad," as God is with both those who walk slow and those who walk fast. But it is "in the slow times of Jesus' life and death that we discover the shape and meaning of love" (p. 81).²⁶ Ceasing to move so quickly into the future, and becoming friends of slowness, enables one to experience fully God's love and one's love for God and neighbour. The above three questions need to be revisited often as the answers will likely change. Discerning how to engage time necessitates critical reflection accompanied by spiritual practice and discipline.

Discernment through Practice

Although numerous spiritual disciplines can facilitate the discernment process, the following five are particularly valuable when discerning how to engage God's time. The first entails being mindful in one's use of technology. The second discipline focuses on regularly attuning ourselves to the present. Third, prayer is essential as well as fourth, keeping Sabbath. And finally, learning to take mini breaks throughout the day can attune us to the present.

Although it may not at first seem like a spiritual practice, being mindful in the use of technology requires spiritual discipline. Foremost, it is important to note that technology, such as smart phones and tablets, can be wonderful tools for facilitating spiritual practices including prayer, meditation, and the study of sacred text. However, far too often we become enslaved to our phones and other devices

²⁶ Swinton, John. 2016. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

and the ways they lure us away from engaging time as God's time. Marshall Cook offered three important tips for curbing the dangerous ways in which technology can intrude upon God's time. The first step is to only acquire the technological tools that we absolutely need. "If the technology still does what you want and need it to do, you don't need a newer, 'better' one" (p. 87).²⁷ The second step is to learn only the technology needed to fulfil God's call. Technology advances at breakneck speeds. Attempts to always have or know the latest and greatest in technological advances can impede your ability to see the use of technology as being toward the service and love of God. Finally, establish tech-free zones or times in your day when you are "off the grid." Feeling the need to be constantly accessible is often about serving one's ego, not God, making a false idol of yourself and your importance. Being constantly plugged in to technology can also be a way of procrastinating other tasks.

When one can set limits and boundaries on the use of technology, it is then easier to practice the second spiritual discipline: attuning your mind and heart to the present. This requires meta cognition, or being mindful to your thoughts, as most often it is the mind that pulls one into the past or the future. When you find your mind ensnared by thoughts of the past or the future, invite yourself back to the present. This may require gaining insight into why thoughts of the past and the future have such a powerful lure for you. This can be due to a vast number of emotions such as guilt and shame, or fear and anxiety, and even excitement and exhilaration. Acknowledging these thoughts and the related feelings, and inviting yourself back into a present state of mind, entails being mindful in a way that can be facilitated by prayer, the third spiritual practice.

In a talk given in 1968, prior to his final pilgrimage to Asia, Thomas Merton spoke about the relationship between prayer and time. He stated, "If we really want prayer, we'll

²⁷ Cook, Marshall J. 2009. *Time Management: A Catholic Approach*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

have to give it time. We must slow down to a human tempo and we'll begin to have time to listen. And as soon as we listen to what's going on, things will begin to take shape by themselves. But for this we must experience time in a new way ... The reason why we don't take time is a feeling that we should keep moving. This is a real sickness. Today time is a commodity, and for each one of us time is mortgaged ... we must approach the whole idea of time in a new way. We live in the fullness of time. Every moment is God's own good time, [God's] *kairos*. The whole thing boils down to giving ourselves in prayer a chance to realise that we have what we seek. We don't have to rush after it. It is there all the time, and if we give it time it will make itself known to us" (p. 40).²⁸

Prayer happens in God's time. Although established and disciplined times of prayer are helpful, the ability to be present to and to listen to God means that time is fluid not fixed. Living in the fullness of time means placing prayer, and the act of listening for the voice of God, above all else. Recently a student shared how his family of origin prays grace before dinner and rushes through it at breakneck speed making the goal of the prayer to eat rather than God. Moving through prayer with urgency is an indication that you are not engaging God's time. By slowing down to pray, and slowing down in our prayers, our hearts and ears are open wider to experience God's response.

The fourth spiritual discipline that can aid one in discerning how to engage God's time is honouring the Sabbath. The import and value of honouring the Sabbath is a topic addressed extensively in the literature, and the reader is encouraged to seek out Dorothy Bass's *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* or Mark Buchanan's *The Rest of God: Restoring Your*

²⁸ deWaal, Esther. 1992. *A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton*. Ann Arbor: Servant Publications.

Soul by Restoring the Sabbath.^{29,30} Honouring the Sabbath is a reminder that in God's time the emphasis is on being rather than doing. Scripture indicates that God's concern for humanity is focused on humanity's ability to love rather than our ability to produce. In addition, Sabbath practice invites one away from a false idolization of self, work, and money as it is an intentional means of pausing one's "toil in order to awaken to joy, rest, and community" (p. 104).³¹ Christian leaders quite often face challenges in honouring the Sabbath given the cultural and historical conflation of Sunday as the Sabbath day. If your call requires work on the traditional, or culturally constructed, Sabbath, then God is likely calling you to another day of Sabbath renewal. Living in God's time, in the fullness of time, affords all God's children with a day for honouring the Sabbath. Failure to identify or honour that day is an indication that further discernment on how to engage God's time is needed as it is likely that you have placed other priorities and demands above the commandment to love God and love neighbour.

A fifth and final spiritual practice that can aid in discerning God's time is what Cook referred to as "mini breaks," intentional ways of pressing pause throughout the day in order to attune to the present.³² As noted above, Jesus moved slowly and remained present to the present rather than rushing into the future. When you find yourself moving faster than Jesus, God is inviting you to a mini break, an opportunity to re-establish your focus on God and God's commandment

²⁹ Bass, Dorothy C. 2001. *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc

³⁰ Buchanan, Mark. 2006. "Schedule, Interrupted: Discovering God's Time-Management Technique." *Christianity Today* 50 (2): 42-45.

³¹ Snodgrass, Jill L. 2014. "Keeping the Sabbath: Privileging Being Beyond Doing." In *Clinician's Guide to Self-Renewal: Essential Advice from the Field*, edited by Robert J.

³² Cook, Marshall J. 2009. *Time Management: A Catholic Approach*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

to love. Mini breaks can include taking a breath break by spending as little as one minute or as long as thirty centring one's attention on deep, diaphragmatic or "belly breathing." Another option is to adopt a mantra or a meditative phrase that re-focuses attention on the fullness of time rather than any sense of urgency. A phrase as simple as "I am present to the fullness of God's time" can lure you to slow down, to stop trying to walk faster than Jesus into the future, and to be present to the present. Others may prefer a phrase grounded in scripture, such as the beginning of Matthew 6:34: "Do not worry about tomorrow." Pausing in the busy-ness to repeat such a phrase is a means of inviting God back to the centre or the foreground of one's consciousness and inviting oneself out of the future and into the present.

Conclusion

Time is not a commodity or something to be spent or managed, but a gift from God. Determining how to be within the gift of God's time requires discernment—critical reflection and spiritual discipline. Such discernment is ongoing and lifelong, with the intention of bringing one closer to God and closer to living out the greatest commandment. The fruit of such discernment is the reminder that "those who are made in God's image have time for one another. To give generously of one's time—to care, notice, value, and appreciate time—is to adopt the attitude of Jesus and to begin to tune one's body into the cadence of God's time and the redemption of all time" (p. 65).³³

³³ Swinton, John. 2016. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

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