



In 1734, the famed Puritan preacher,  
Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon  
on redeeming time.

I was shocked to find out  
that even 285 years ago,  
faithful people were wrestling  
with what to do with the time  
they had been given.

I read through a good bit of that sermon,  
though it is a tad repetitious and lengthy.  
Those Puritans liked a good (long) sermon.

I'm trying to imagine Edwards,  
in his colonial white wig  
and tightly buttoned black waistcoat,  
bellowing out,  
"Though all time is very precious,  
yet some parts are more precious than others;  
as, particularly, holy time is more precious  
than common time.

Such time is of great advantage  
for our everlasting welfare.

Therefore, above all,  
improve your Sabbaths,  
and especially the time of public worship,  
which is the most precious part.

Lose it not either in sleep,  
or in carelessness,  
inattention,  
and wandering imaginations."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apuritansmind.com/puritan-favorites/jonathan-edwards/sermons/the-preciousness-of-time-and-the-importance-of-redeeming-it/>

Hmm...Sinner take note...

Now I have to confess

I don't necessarily buy into  
the demarcation between sacred  
and profane or ordinary time.

I don't know that I view  
this time we spend together here,  
anymore important  
than the time you spend with your family  
or time we spent on a hike  
—though I do wish you all hiked on Saturdays  
or spent time with your families  
on Sunday afternoons...  
I mean momma's gotta work!

But declaring some time

more sacred than others  
—well what I really think we mean is  
that there is a difference  
in our awareness of time.

There are times when I am more open  
to the holy that is *always* present  
for me to notice.

It is a sacred to pause time  
to watch your baby sleep.

It is a sacred time  
when you sit on your front porch,  
early in the morning with your coffee  
—still and calm.

And it is sacred time when you are here  
singing with 75 other people,  
singing!

Mary Oliver, the poet, penned,



Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.  
Be Astonished.  
Tell about it.

But time, is ever slipping from our grasp, isn't?  
What are the two things  
we think we don't have enough of?  
Time and money.

#truth

Apparently Socrates once said,  
beware of the bareness of a busy life.  
And he was alive way before 1734!

I quoted Annie Dillard in a sermon  
not too long ago,  
"How we spend our days is,  
of course, how we spend our lives.  
What we do with this hour,  
and that one,  
is what we are doing."<sup>2</sup>

How we handle our time  
creates not only meaning in our lives,  
but it also dictates a sense  
of morality we have about time.  
A British sociologist points out,  
"People tend to be very moralistic,  
rigid and defensive about their own,  
and other people's, time keeping behavior."  
The norms surrounding punctuality  
are unforgiving.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Annie Dillard, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/530337-how-we-spend-our-days-is-of-course-how-we#targetText=%E2%80%9CHow%20we%20spend%20our%20days%20is%2C%20of%20course%2C%20how.a%20net%20for%20catching%20days.>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg. 5

Ask Tripp sometime how I feel about  
his punctuality.

Grace is indeed in short supply  
when it comes to someone else's time keeping habits  
—especially when they bump up  
against our own.

In terms of stewardship,  
“how we live *in* time  
shapes the quality of our relationships  
with our innermost selves,  
with other people,  
with the natural world,  
and with God.”<sup>4</sup>



Our ancestors relied much more  
on the natural world that we do.  
Darkness and light dictated the passage of days;  
falling leaves,  
piling snow,  
sprouting tulips  
and growing watermelons  
determined the seasons of their years.  
But nowadays, we are largely removed  
from the natural world.  
I groan when it is time to rake leaves.  
I belly ache when the snow  
sticks around for days  
and means muddy paw prints  
on the kitchen floor.

We have more windows painted shut  
than I'd like and I'm so thankful  
for working air conditioning in my car.  
So no matter what time of the year it is

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<sup>4</sup> Dorothy C. Bass, Receiving The Day (Jossey Bass, 2001 preface, xii)

I control enough of my environment  
to have little reliance on seasonal changes.  
Aside from my allergies,  
I'm not very involved with the seasons.  
I'm aware of them,  
I mean you can get themed Oreos  
for any season, people,  
but I'm not involved in the seasons:  
certainly not dependent on their passage,  
not dependent on the journey of time  
like our great-great-great grandparents  
would have been.

And it what me wonder what I,  
what we might be missing,  
when it comes to time  
and its rhythmic change throughout the year.

Because there is a pattern,  
a habit to time's passage  
that might serve as a template for our lives  
for patterns and habits to develop  
to receive time as a gift.

My lack of involvement with time as gift  
has made me more like a dictator of time.  
I view time in terms of usefulness  
and efficiency  
time is of the essence—how can it benefit me?  
What control or management  
can I implement onto time?

Because I don't think I'm the only  
who operates this way,  
it begs the question,  
don't we need to develop life patterns and habits  
so that we aren't just more efficient  
in our *living into time*  
but also living "with greater authenticity  
as human beings created in God's image?"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, preface xiii



Every year in June the PCUSA  
sends out paper calendars, like this one.

But not this year.

This year they were late.

Not because of an ordering mishap on Mary's part,  
but because on the whole  
the PCUSA sent out the calendars  
later toward fall.

There were all sorts of FB posts on the Young PCUSA Leaders page...  
*where are the calendars;*

*are they still making them;*

*anyone checked with the national office in Louisville?*

We were a little beside ourselves here,  
in several staff meetings

concerned about how much we needed  
our new calendars.

We had events to plan  
and programs with start dates.

Part of our staff meetings each week  
is going over the calendar  
so we don't miss anything  
or book two things

at the same time in the same place.

You all know what I'm talking about.

But all this organizing and scheduling  
has taught us to look at time,  
as though we own and control it.

As though it is just this box on my calendar  
or this rectangle in my planner.

We have taught ourselves  
that time is a puzzle or problem

to be worked out  
something that can be  
manipulated and pieced together  
to comfortable fit  
our own picture and reality.  
Mary, our church bookkeeper  
and administrator says with frequency  
and sometimes a blunt firmness,  
when there is a scheduling error,  
'it is already on the calendar;'  
it is her way of saying,  
this time is set in stone.  
unmoving, unwavering,  
this piece of the puzzle only fits here.



We have two calendars at home,  
one is just for pictures and the other,  
the other is white board calendar  
with all our activities (or most of them)  
on our refrigerator.  
You see, we are the masters  
and mistresses of time.

Time is something I can manage and control,  
it is you see, theses little boxes and blocks  
and the activities I put in them.  
I'm sure you are like me,  
and sometimes when you are looking at your  
calendar  
with all the things written inside,  
don't you secretly wish for a few more blocks?

If I had more time,  
if I had more blocks on my calendar  
I could do more.  
Just last night,

a church member was talking about  
how things at his workplace were stretched;  
“we just need 2 more hours in the day,  
don’t we?” he pined.

If only we could have  
more space on our white board  
because there is nothing on any of my calendars  
that says, *read*.  
There is no mark on my calendar  
that says, *rest*.  
It isn’t that I don’t do those things,  
but I don’t do them as often  
as I do things that I do write on my calendar,  
like Family Ministry meeting  
or take Huntley to dance  
or bring an appetizer for the LR tailgate.

You see if it is on the calendar,  
I’m more likely to do it.  
Are you like that too?

Dorothy Bass in her book,  
*Receiving the Day*, writes,  
“Busy people may think  
that what we need  
is a few more open boxes  
on the pages of our datebooks.  
But in fact that would only provide  
a flat and short-lived remedy,  
and ***not only*** because  
those boxes would soon fill up like all the others.  
What we really need  
is time of a different quality.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg.3





Time is one of the first things that God creates,  
calling the light forward  
and separating the light from the darkness;  
naming the light, day and the darkness, night,  
God creates a rhythm and cadence to creation.  
It is the first gift,  
*a balance of time*  
—for work **and** for rest.

Time has more to give us than we think.  
We say, time flies.  
We blink and another year has gone by.  
Just this week,  
a former youth group member of mine,  
from when I worked at Rumble Presbyterian in Blowing Rock,  
passed away from cancer at 32.  
Stanley Hauerwas says that,  
“Death creates an economy  
that makes certain things valuable  
in a way that would not be valuable if we didn’t die.”<sup>7</sup>

This is so true and I don’t want to be that preacher  
that stands here to say,  
what if you die today...  
but here’s the thing I do want to say,  
time is so precious.  
It is a gift from God.  
Perhaps in today’s busy, beyond hectic world;  
in our society’s rigid, unrelenting

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, The Economy of Death, <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-economy-of-death>

managing of time;  
in a culture that sees all of time  
as workable instead of a balance  
of work and rest;  
perhaps *time's gift* is worth redeeming.

“Time is not our enemy  
but our meeting place  
with God and one another.”<sup>8</sup>  
And sometimes that is saying  
the same thing.

Our time of worship  
isn't more sacred  
than other times of our days.  
But what is unique about this time here  
is hopefully the quality of time.  
So let me make a case  
for the time we spend here.



In this place when we are here  
and therefore giving of our own time to be here,  
we've agreed  
that will work hard to be present.  
We have an agreement,  
I think,  
that we will work hard to be attentive.  
We will, together,  
create times of silence:  
for prayer, for meditation, for rest.

We will be sensitive to the times  
when we need to hold each other up  
and we will sense when the time

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy C. Bass, [Receiving The Day](#) (Jossey Bass, 2001 preface, xii)

is right and speak the truth.

We will give each other the space and time  
to agree and disagree.

We promise to use the time we have together  
to teach, to nurture,  
to change diapers  
for each other's children.

The quality of time we practice here,  
even briefly then,  
can be a model  
for the time we spend  
away from here.

Redeeming time,  
might start with a priority  
to make time to be here together.

And then while we are here,  
we practice spending quality time together.

How many of us  
spend too much time at the office?

How many of us feel like  
we spend too much time on the road?

How many of us  
spend too much time  
on our phones, tablets and laptops?

How many of us spend too much time at church?

Sarah, Katherine we can't raise our hands.  
Ha.

When it comes down to it,  
time, is something we give to each other  
that lasts.

Many of you with teenagers  
will say that for Christmas  
you want to give your kids experiences,  
instead of things.

What is an experience,  
but time spent together?

To decided to go against  
the structuring and control,  
the constant organizing and management of time  
in our culture is not something we can do alone  
...that is a task  
too much for individual shoulders.  
We will absolutely have to have each other  
—that might be  
what makes our time here spent together  
even more important.



Psalm 90 is said to be a song of Moses  
when he was atop Mt. Pisgah,  
looking down into the promised land.  
The time of wandering was over,  
and Moses is close to death.  
He knows that the work he has done  
of leading the people in the desert,  
was over.  
Perhaps some of his work  
was even teaching the Israelites  
over those 40 years about time,  
about God's time.

But the work that lay ahead  
would be carried on by someone else.  
Teach us to count our days, O Lord,

Moses declares over 4000 yrs ago, and in doing so,  
echoes our own longing for redeeming time.  
Remind us, that we are here only briefly,  
and we are not in control of time.  
But we are given it as a gift.

The divine task is to live into time  
with the authenticity of our created-ness  
and to find the balance of work and rest,  
together.

for you O Lord, have been our dwelling place for generations.  
“Only a dwelling place of the breadth and depth of God  
can finally count and hold  
all the days, weeks, and years of our lives”  
throughout our history.<sup>9</sup>

Where does God dwell?  
In us.

The Puritan preacher was right (285 yrs ago),  
in his instructions to improve our Sabbaths,  
not as a day of rest  
but as the quality of our time  
together.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us  
And prosper the work of our hands...  
so that we live into the gift of time.

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<sup>9</sup> Dorothy C. Bass, Receiving The Day (Jossey Bass, 2001 pg.121)