

Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward
Relationships – Responsibilities – Resources
The Resource of Time

Goal: That participants would understand and live out the fact that time is a precious gift of God and that He expects us to steward that gift according to His will and for His purposes.

Introduction: Ask participants to share some sayings about time that they have heard and appreciate. Some examples might include:

- Time is money.
- Time waits for no one.
- Time flies.
- A stitch in time saves nine.
- Time is precious.
- Better late than never.
- In the nick of time.
- In the blink of an eye.
- Too much time on one's hands.
- Killing time.

Read the following quote by businessman Harvey Mackay and ask the participants to react to it. "Time is free, but it's priceless. You can't own it, but you can use it. You can't keep it, but you can spend it. Once you've lost it, you can never get it back."

God gives us the precious gift of time. How much He gives each of us is in His good and gracious hands. We have the privilege and the responsibility to steward the time He gives faithfully, wisely, and fruitfully.

The Bible has a lot to say about time.

Psalms 90 helps us understand the biblical perspective of time.

What do the following verses teach us about time?

- Psalm 90:2

Answer: Here God contrasts His eternity with man's transitoriness. The Psalmist emphasizes that point when he says, "from everlasting to everlasting you are God." God is the same for eternity.

- Psalm 90:4

Answer: God is independent from time. God sees time differently than we do. God is not limited by time and He never changes.

- Psalm 90:10

Answer: As created human beings our time on earth is limited to a specific number of days. God sets those limits. Sin makes those years difficult.

- Psalm 90:12

Answer: God expects us to realize that our time on earth is limited. We are to live our lives with that knowledge and steward the days entrusted to us with wisdom—the wisdom He gives.

- Psalm 90:14

Answer: God’s love for us in Christ allows us to live (spend our time) in joy and gladness—even when times are hard.

John F. Brug notes in the second volume of *Psalms: The People’s Bible*, “Moses’ closing prayer (in Psalm 90) contains two elements. The first is a plea for understanding and wisdom. As we daily observe death all around us, we are warned to make the most of this time of grace which God has given us, since death is inevitable. We are warned against being like the rich fool who accumulated treasure on earth, but forgot about the needs of his soul (Luke 12:13-21). Since we have only one life and that one life is short, we should use it to gain the wisdom which comes from God. That wisdom is the message of the gospel through which we gain forgiveness of sin and salvation....The second part of the prayer is a plea for mercy. We do not deserve to have our life prolonged, but we pray that God will give us the time and the wisdom to serve him faithfully on this earth.” Page 85

The New Testament uses two Greek words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*.

Chronos is the measure of exact time. Matthew 2:7 gives an example of *chronos*. *Kairos* is the appointed time in the purposes of God. Ephesians 1:7-10 gives an example of *kairos*.

Josh Pauling in an online article, *Living by Kairos Time in a Chronos World*, writes “Throughout life, we should be weaving in and out of *kairos* and *chronos* seamlessly.”

What do you suppose he means by that? See Romans 6:1-14

Answer: As Christians we understand the difference between “exact time” and “appointed time.” While we live in the moment, we know that God is in time accomplishing His will and His ways. Pauling continues, “Throughout life, we should be weaving in and out of *kairos* and *chronos* seamlessly. As a primary example, consider the historic church’s framing of time. The church’s life doesn’t do away with *chronos*; it properly orders and situates *chronos* in relation

to *kairos*. Heaven is breaking in, seeping into our world as the interpenetrating realities of space and time, heaven and earth, mind and matter all converge and unite around Christ who is made manifest in Word and Sacrament. The unfolding of sacramental and liturgical life helps bring *kairos* to life.

Daily life in Christ takes on a cruciform and baptismal shape (Romans 6:1-14) as we daily drown our sins and rise to new life and are strengthened in our true identity. As Luther's Small Catechism explains, "the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." In this sense, baptism is not a human work done solely in *chronos* time, but a gift of cosmic proportions that connects *chronos* and *kairos* through the tangible, physical means of water through the power of the Word. We remember our baptism and its specific chronological date and celebrate it each year with gratitude because it is a *kairos* moment; that is, is a moment in which God enters into *chronos* redemptively. *Kairos* and *chronos* touch in the waters of our baptism as the Word of God is proclaimed, making things new, making alive what was once dead."

Read Ephesians 5:15-16 in the King James Version. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

What does God mean when He tells us to "redeem the time?"

Answer: To redeem something means to buy it back or regain possession of it. Redeeming the time means to "take back" the use of time so that it is used to God's glory and not wasted or used only for selfish or self-centered purposes. Jerald C. Joersz writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, "Time is a precious commodity not to be wasted. Paul is saying, 'take advantage of the opportunities that come your way' as you live wisely (unlike an 'unwise' life full of missed opportunities; cf. Gal 1:4). *days are evil*. Although Christ has given Himself for our sins to 'deliver us from the present evil age' (Gal 6:10), Christians are to make the most of the time they have because the 'forces of evil' are still actively set against them (6:12; 2Tm 3:1)." Page 152

R. C. Rein, in *Adventures in Christian Stewardship*, suggests three reasons why this is so important. He writes:

"First, we need to be reminded often that our time of life on earth is short and, at best, very uncertain."

Discuss what this means to a steward by God's design. Rein explains, "The average time of life for the individual often falls short of 'threescore years and ten' mentioned by the Psalmist (Ps 90:10). But, assuming that your life would continue for 70 years, that would make a total of 25,550 days. When you deduct from this amount your childhood years, your time for sleeping, eating, illness, exercise, and other routines, you will not have so much as 12 solid years left for work. Truly, our time in this world is short, and we must all confess in the words of the holy writers: 'Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding' (1 Chr 29:15; James

4:14). 'We spend our years as a tale that is told' (Ps 90:9). 'For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away' (1 Peter 1:24)." Page 31

"Secondly, the admonition to redeem the time is extremely important, because the time of life granted to our fellow men, whom we are to win for Christ, is no longer and no more certain than our own."

Discuss what this means to a steward by God's design. Rein writes, "Death for us or for them will mark the end of that opportunity. The Scriptural admonitions: 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near' (Is 55:6); 'Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6:2); 'Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts' (Heb. 3:15), are not only a call to repentance to those who do not as yet know Christ, but are also intended to remind us that we have but a limited time in which we can lead our fellow men to Christ. Surely there is no greater tragedy in life than when people fail to recognize their great purpose in life and put off their salvation until it is too late. (Matt. 23:37, 38; Luke 19:42.)" Page 31-32

"Thirdly, the admonition to redeem the time is extremely important because of the uncertainty of the time in which this world will end and the day of grace will be forever gone."

Discuss what this means to a steward by God's design. Rein continues, "It is significant to note that Christ has some very serious words of warning for Christian stewards in this connection. 'Watch therefore,' He says, 'for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.' (Matt. 24:42-46; Matt. 25:13; Mark 13:32-37)...Indeed, time is the most valuable thing in the world when we view it as a period of grace which God grants us to fulfill our life's purpose. But with so many things in life to do, how are we to find time for them all? Good stewardship requires that we make proper use of our time." Pages 32-33

Ask participants to share ways that we can "make proper use of our time." Ask them how they budget their time—at home, at work, at play, etc.

What else do the following passages tell us about time?

- Colossians 4:5-6

Paul encourages wisdom as we make the best use of our time when we talk to "outsiders." Our speech is to be winsome, gracious, and seasoned with salt so that we give the best witness to them.

- Psalm 139:16

God owns time. He determines the number of days we have. Our time is truly in His loving and gracious hands. In response to His love for us in Christ we desire to use the time as He wills and directs.

- Titus 3:8

Paul instructs Titus and us to “devote our lives to good works”—that is how we are supposed to spend the time God entrusts to our care.

Close the study by reading Psalm 90:1-5 and the verses from the hymn *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* by Isaac Watts printed on the left side of the page. If time permits, have participants suggest what Watts was trying to convey about time in each verse. (This hymn is in the public domain.)

The following information about the hymn “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” is found on the website hymnary.org:

“This text was written by Isaac Watts in 1714, shortly before the death of Queen Anne of England. This was a time of great crises and turmoil, as the successor of Queen Anne was as yet undetermined, and the fear of a monarch who would reinstate the persecution of Protestants was great. King George I prevented such persecution, but the fear before Anne’s death was great. This was the context in which Watts wrote his powerful text, now lauded as “one of the grandest in the whole realm of English Hymnody” (Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, 54).”

Most hymnals contain six verses of the hymn “O God, Our Help in Ages Past. There are more. *The Lutheran Hymnal* has this as verse five: “Thy word commands our flesh to dust: ‘Return, ye sons of men!’ All nations rose from earth at first and turn to earth again.”

Additional Scripture verses concerning time are listed below.

Foundational Biblical truths about time:

- Psalm 104:19 He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.
- Psalm 31:15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.
- Psalm 90:10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- Psalm 90:12 Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- James 4:13-15 **13** Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” **14** Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. **15** Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

The importance of time:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 11 **1** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: **2** a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, **3** a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, **4** a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, **5** a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, **6** a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, **7** a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, **8** a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace...**11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Esther 4:14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 **1** Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **2** for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

1 Chronicles 29:15 For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding.

2 Timothy 3:1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

God's Timing is Perfect:

Romans 5:6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever

2 Corinthians 6:2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Mark 13:32 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

2 Peter 3:8-9 **8** But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Instructions for God's stewards:

1 Chronicles 16:11 Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!

Psalms 39:4-5 "O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah

Romans 13:11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Ephesians 5:15-17 **15** Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

John 9:4 Work while it is day We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

Colossians 4:5-6 **5** Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. **6** Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Mark 13:32-33 **32** "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.