

A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven

Ecclesiastes 3

The Stewardship of Time

"Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Psalms 90:12

The first long-term Orthodox Christian missionary priest from America to East Africa was sent by Archbishop Iakovos in mid-1980s. As he gradually assimilated into the local culture, he found the local concept of time to be a most difficult adjustment, and upon his return to America, liked to quote the Kenyans who loved to tell him, "White men have watches. We have time."

Our brief time on earth is God's gift. As faithful Christians, we are accountable for our stewardship of this precious gift. The American scientist Thomas Edison said, "Time is not a commodity that can be stored for future use. It must be invested hour by hour or else it is gone forever."

"Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow."

Psalms 144:4

Our lifetime is a small bit of eternity, "a fleeting shadow" (Psalms 144), which we receive as

stewards. Time is a precious gift that we dare not waste. Like the three stewards in the Parable of the Talents, one day God will call each one of us to give account of how we have used the time entrusted to us.

"...a time for every purpose under heaven."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

There is "a time for every purpose," as the verse from Ecclesiastes instructs us, "a time to plant, a time to reap..." The challenge is to appropriately allocate our time to the various purposes that make claims on it. The passage teaches us to make the most of God's great gift of time.

The Gift of Time

"The greatest gift I ever received," said a young attorney, "was a gift I got one Christmas from my dad. He gave me a small box with a note inside that said, 'Son, this year I will give you 365 hours, one hour every day after dinner. We'll talk about what you want to talk about, go where you want to go, play what you want to play.'"

The young attorney continued, "My dad not only kept the promise of his gift, but he renewed it every year – and it's the greatest gift I ever had in my life. I am the result of his time."

The most personal, most appreciated and most unique gift that you can give is the gift of time – *your* time. That valuable 24 hours a

day that only you can spend. Depending on your profession, your time may be worth hundreds of dollars an hour. But the time you give to another person and the Church is priceless.

Our children need our time, helping shape their lives by word and by example. The time we give to our children is an investment in their lives that is not wasted.

Spending Time with God

As Christians it is also important to value the time we spend at church in worship, service and activities. Every member of the Body of Christ plays a role, according to their gifts, in the life of the local church. The church is not a social club, but rather a place where people of faith gather for worship, fellowship and service.

Most importantly, we gather together in worship, praising and thanking God for the blessings in our lives and hearing His Word. Of the 168 hours in every week with which we have been blessed, we offer back the short time we spend in church on Sunday morning and other services, gathered together as the Body of Christ. We are united in prayer and united in Holy Communion. We become His hands and feet carrying out His work in the world. As we offer ourselves and our time as His Church, we are part of something much bigger than we can imagine – much bigger than the project we support, the service we provide, the prayer we offer.

The Great Feast (Luke 14)

In the Gospel of Luke we read of the man who planned a great feast and invited many people. When it was time to serve the dinner, they were all too busy – one with his farm, one with his bride, another with his oxen. We can become so busy making a living that we forget to make a life. God gets crowded out of our lives over the most unimportant things.

At the first Christmas when Jesus was born, there was no room at the inn. And today we still have no room for Jesus. We crowd Him out with so many things.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis shows how the devil captures us, not by preventing encounters with God, but by whispering in our ear that we are “just too busy right now. We’ll get to that soon. But just not right now.”

Resetting Our Priorities

Just as we budget our financial resources to reflect our priorities, we can reset our allocation of time. We are all busy, but not all of that busy time is well-spent. We may need to say no to certain demands on our time, opening our schedule to God’s prompting. We can live each day anticipating the opportunities he places in our path to offer our gift of time.

For Further Reflection...

Are you a contributing member of the Body of Christ? Are you actively serving God and sharing Him with others? Are you contributing to peace and unity within His Body? Do you worship regularly? Take a moment to evaluate your life in light of these principles.

We are called to apply our gifts, training, abilities, education and skills to the tasks that God places before us. If we do this humbly and prayerfully, the Body of Christ will function to its full potential.

The Biblical motivation for giving is grace; giving is an act of worship in response to the generosity of God. You are to give, Paul says, “as God has prospered you.” In II Corinthians 8 and 9 he teaches clearly, “He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” God blesses those who give with generosity.

Giving is a way to thank God for His grace and generosity. The question is not, “How much do I give to stay in the club?” or “What are the dues?” but “How can I thank God for my many blessings?”



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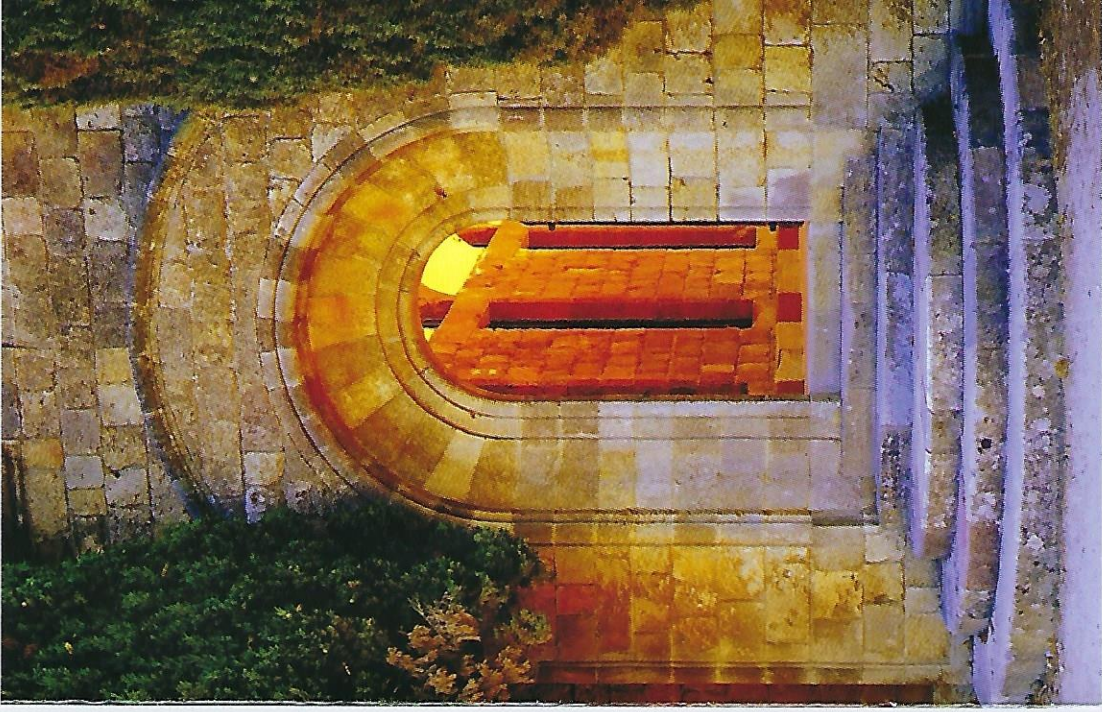
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