

Good Soil



A place for growth and nurture

Session 3.1: TIME

INTRODUCTION: STEWARDSHIP - FAITH IN ACTION

In this series of four sessions, we will be thinking about how we put our faith into action. What is our loving response to God? **How can we be good stewards of our *time, talents, treasure and territory*?**

These sessions will touch on many issues that may be challenging for us personally about our lifestyles, habits, attitudes, and use of resources. It's important not to think of this as demanding or overbearing, but rather designed to gently lead us into a place where we can trust God and serve God. Take and use what is helpful to you in this material. Some things may not be appropriate for you at this time, or may need further thought. Most of all, enjoy sharing together.

PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Before the session, try to catch up with the members of your group individually. Make sure they know the dates and arrangements for this series of sessions. Ask if there is anything we could do differently to help them. Perhaps see if there are any new people at church you could invite to your group (if you have the space).

This session gives four Bible passages and invites you to choose two or three! Be prepared, and think about how you'll make this choice.

THINKING ABOUT TIME (reflection – for reading at home)

This session's theme is **time**. Time surrounds us like a river: we plunge into it when we are born and are swept along its course. As we grow, we become more aware of it – looking forward to things downstream, and looking back on landmarks passed. Sometimes the current flows more quickly than we would like – dragging us from one thing to the next. At other times we might rest in a gentle pool, enjoying the moment, before being swept along again. But the river never flows backwards, no matter how hard we try to swim against it.

Time flies when you're having fun, or can drag when you're listening to a sermon! It has the power to heal and yet can also be our greatest enemy. We can measure time in relation to the sun, moon and stars, and record it to the tiniest fraction of a second, and yet cannot really describe what it is. It seems to be simply the inevitable, irreversible direction we're all heading in.

Modern society has invested much in 'time-saving' devices, and yet it seems we've never been so busy! *"I don't know where the time goes!"* *"If only there were more hours in the day!"* Time seems to be as elusive as ever. No technology can retrieve it once it's gone. Many live by the motto "time is money", when perhaps we should say "time is priceless". It is possibly the most valuable of all God's natural gifts to us, and yet the one we waste most easily. Sadly, it's often only when our time is cut short that we truly appreciate the gift that we had.

Charles Wesley wrote about our use of time in one of his hymns, and this verse seems tinged with regret, longing to use his time (and more of it!) to share the love of God and make Christ known:

I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone,
to spend and to be spent, for them
who have not yet my Saviour known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe thy love.

by **Charles Wesley** (1707-1788),
Taken from *Singing the Faith*, no. **661**.

In preparation, spend some time thinking about how you use your time! *What are your struggles or frustrations? What do you wish you could make more time for? What takes up too much of your time? What are the timeless moments you enjoy?* As you reflect, try turning these things into prayers, and make this time into time with God.

You could try one of these, as a one-off, or part of a daily pattern:

A PRAYER FOR THE MORNING

Blessèd are you, Lord our God,
Giver of life,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
At the opening of this day
you call us out of darkness
into your marvellous light.
Blessèd are you for ever and ever. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR THE EVENING

Lord our God,
at the ending of this day,
and in the darkness and silence of this night,
cover us with healing and forgiveness,
that we may take our rest in peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers taken from *The Methodist Worship Book*, pages 7 and 24,
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STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR ROOTS!

In groups of two or three, spend 3 minutes (timed!) talking to each other about how you spent your Christmas and New Year.

At the end of the 3 minutes: *How did that feel? Did you have enough time, or did it drag? Was there more to say, or not a lot?*

What questions do you have about the subject of time? Do you find time-management easy or difficult? Is it different at different phases of your life? (e.g. at school, raising a family, working, or retired?)

READING THE SCRIPTURES AND DIGGING DEEPER

Here are **four** passages of scripture with different themes to explore. You might want to **choose two or three** to discuss, leaving time for prayer. Perhaps leave some for another week. Don't feel you have to do them all!

1. FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Reading: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 (New International Version)

*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.*

This passage from the Old Testament seems to be saying that God has given us time for everything that is needed. Of course, some things on the list we might not want to do (“a time to kill”, for example), but generally they are the things that make up life in all its fullness, with all of its ups and downs. The reading suggests getting things in the right balance, and allowing time to do and reflect on these things.

When we rush through life, do we unconsciously prioritise some things and conveniently ignore others?

Do we spend enough time paying attention to things like being silent, mourning (lamenting), planting and healing? What in this list are the things you do more, and what do you never seem to have time for?

How do you balance your life? Does it just happen, or have you been deliberate about allowing time for certain things?

How can our faith help us to balance to our lives? Have we got it right? Where and how can you change the balance in your life? Do you make time for... rest? exercise? prayer? silence? laughter? dancing? Bible-reading? What things distract or snatch away time?

2. MAKING TIME FOR OURSELVES... AND GOD

Reading: Mark 2: 23-28 (New Revised Standard Version)

One sabbath he [Jesus] was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' ²⁵ And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' ²⁷ Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

According to the gospels, Jesus was often getting into disputes about the religious laws concerning the Sabbath. In this story, Jesus was rebuked by the Pharisees (a strict Jewish holiness movement) for plucking grain to eat while they walked on the Sabbath. Jesus points them to a biblical story of David (found in **1 Samuel chapter 21**): When David was on the run, he persuaded the high priest to give him some of the sacred bread, which was reserved only for the priests. It is an example of human need taking priority over the more ritualistic

of God's laws (designed to give order to the regular patterns of religious life). There is much we could say about this story, but importantly Jesus points out that God gave the Sabbath to be a benefit to humankind (verse 27).

How has our keeping of the 'Sabbath' changed over the years? What do you think is for the better, and what is worse?

Keeping the Sabbath day holy is the 4th of the 10 Commandments (**Exodus 20:8-11**). *Why do you think it is so important to God that we have one day of the week to rest? Have we come to see it as a duty or a gift? What does this command tell us about God's nature?*

This subject of 'Sabbath' should say something about the importance of **making time for ourselves** – to rest and be recharged – and **making time for God**. Both can be difficult where other demands seem so demanding at times, or other distractions so compelling.

How easy or hard do you find it to keep the Sabbath holy and to rest? If you have to work on a Sunday, do you try to keep another day as 'sabbath'? What do you do to make it special? Or, what is preventing you? And what could you do to 'clear the way'?

3. TIME AS A GIFT

Reading: Luke 10: 38- (New Revised Standard Version)

Now as they went on their way, he [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴² there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

This timeless story from Luke's Gospel, gives us a snapshot into the lives of two sisters: one who kept busy serving and one who found time to sit at Jesus' feet and listen. It can be easy to stereotype people into these categories; Mary and Martha would have both been naturally more rounded, complicated personalities! But Jesus does seem to be saying that making the choice to stop, just to 'be', to listen to him, and to have quality time in his presence is of the utmost importance. That time together is clearly a blessing to both Jesus and Mary. This is a gift God offers us freely and wants us to find.

Can we be so busy in God's service or in the service of others that we don't find (or make) the time to stop, and have quality time in the presence of God?

How would we feel if we made this a part of our daily routine? (like brushing our teeth!) Time with God doesn't need to be lengthy, either. 5 minutes are better than none. Can we develop the habit? What have you found helpful that you can share with others in the group?

Time with God is not the full extent of our stewardship of time, but it should be the beginning – the place from which everything else flows.

Giving our time to others can be a gift too. It is an expression of love that can be worth more than material gifts or other things. It can make a person feel valued, listened to, and most of all loved. *Who might love to receive the gift of your quality time and your full attention?*

4. YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER

Reading: Hebrews 13: 1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

Let mutual love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' ⁶ So we can say with confidence,

*'The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'*

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

This passage is one of several in the New Testament reminding us what to prioritise in our lives: mutual love, hospitality, concern for those in prison or persecuted, faithfulness in marriage, contentment, and awareness of God's help and presence. It encourages us to look for inspiration to the lives of those who lead us in faith – but also remember them in prayer because they may be struggling too. Finally, it reminds us that **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever** (v.8). When we feel swept along by the river of time, uncertain of our destination or out of control, Jesus is there from start to finish, and God holds the whole river in hands of love.

What reassurance does this verse give to you today?

How can we be sure that God's love stands the test of time?

What does 'forever' mean to you?

What does faith in Jesus teach us about eternity?

And finally, how does God's forgiveness and healing help us to be assured that even time wasted can be redeemed in God's love?

PRAYING TOGETHER and SONGS on next page...

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Thank God for the fellowship you've shared together;
- Pray for those who are stressed and struggling in their use of time; and for those who are lonely with lots of time to spare;
- Pray for any who are in need of healing or comfort at the moment; or those suffering in our world.
- Pray that we will be good stewards of all God gives us.
- You might like to say **the Lord's Prayer** together.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO LISTEN TO (or your own choice)

Available on *YouTube* using the links below:



Come, Now is the Time to Worship, by Brian Doerksen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6guWKnmxYU>

While I Wait, by Lincoln Brewster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NswPPVgMaPE>

Christ be in my Waking, by Stuart Townend

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4emGI1gHPA>

COMING SOON in GOOD SOIL...

Session 3.2: TALENTS

Session 3.3: TREASURE

Session 3.4: TERRITORY