The Time of Our Lives

In his song “Time in a Bottle,” Jim Croce sings about wishing he could capture and contain time so he could spend eternity with the one he loved. But he laments that:

> *There never seems to be enough time*
> *To do the things you want to do*
> *Once you find them*

You know the feeling. Our days get filled up with things that, upon reflection, don’t seem to really matter much, leaving little time for things that are important. Rather than being a friend, time seems more like a foe; “more of a nemesis or taskmaster,” says organizational coach Mark Freier.{1}

In the Middle Ages, time was measured primarily in periods within which people dwelt. Days were divided into rhythmic patterns: sunrise, breakfast time, work hours, evening, sunset. Hours were significant in relation to the daily cycle of prayers prescribed by the Church. But even in that case, there wasn’t a concern with sticking to precise times of the day.

In the Middle Ages people weren’t primarily concerned with time measured by the clock but with the quality of life’s experiences.

As the West moved into modernity, clock time assumed greater importance. Now we worry, not only about hours, but about minutes. As a fund raising specialist told me, if you ask a businessman for ten minutes, take ten minutes and no more. His time is carefully apportioned out, and, as we have heard many times, time is money.

Busyness has become so routine that we easily feel guilty if we don’t have anything we have to do. How can we “waste time”

like that? But that's usually not a problem! The world outside has a way of filling up our daily planner even if we don't.

There are two ways to think about time I'd like to consider, designated by different words.

One is *chronos.* Chronos was the name given by the Greeks to the god who represented time. Chronos time is clock time. It is marked off by seconds, minutes, hours. Chronos is what I'm thinking about when I'm adding new things to my daily calendar. It's the measure of time I can give to one project or person before I must be moving on to the next item on the agenda.

The other word for time is *kairos.* Kairos was a child of Zeus. He represented opportunity. While chronos time is a quantitative thing, kairos is more qualitative; the concern is with the *what* that is to be done and the importance of doing it. Both are ways of measuring our experience in life, but they do so quite differently. Let's look at them more closely.

Two things help with understanding what kairos is. It speaks of the quality of our actions and of opportunity. Kairos time focuses on what we're doing (or planning to do) rather than the number of minutes or hours it will take. And it connotes the perfect time, the perfect moment, to do what needs to be done. It points to the significance of certain things. Success isn't measured by how many things we get done in a short amount of time, but by how well we've done the important things.

Theologian Daniel Clendenin uses Martin Luther King, Jr., and an example of someone who wanted to grasp the moment. Even though he knew his life had been threatened, he determined to press on with his work for civil rights. It was the time for that, even if King's chronos time might well be cut short very soon. And indeed it was.{2}

Winston Churchill provides another illustration. When things

were going very badly for England in World War II, Churchill rallied the country to fight as hard as they could, because it was a time in which freedom could be lost by many, many people. The Nazis had to be defeated. It was the right time, in the sense of kairos. But even as kairos speaks of the opportunity to do something great, it can also be fraught with danger.

Still one more illustration is the song by the Byrds, *Turn, Turn, Turn,* taken from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes:

> *To everything / There is a season / And a time to every purpose, under Heaven*
> *A time to be born, a time to die / A time to plant, a time to reap*

Notice the songwriter didn't say, "There's a time to plant, and that's at 6 a.m. on September 3. And we have eight hours to get it done." Even though farmers might set a day for everyone to gather and begin, that isn't the point of the song (or the Scripture). The time to plant is different from the time to harvest. When it's time to plant, nothing else will do but to plant.

Chronos and kairos are certainly connected, but they are qualitatively different. Kairos intersects chronos. It is within chronos time that we experience kairos. We can't have kairos without chronos, but we can have chronos without kairos.

Chronos time can often be made up, but that isn't so easy with kairos. I can find an open half hour block in my schedule tomorrow for that meeting I couldn't attend today. But can I get back that time I should have given a co-worker who's been going through tough times and really needed a listening ear? What matters with kairos isn't whether something fits in my schedule. What matters is, what matters! In kairos time, minutes aren't the measure of the value of our acts. The

things we do, rather, grant value to the minutes they take. Mark Freier put it very well: ""To miscalculate kronos {3} is inconvenient. To miscalculate kairos is lamentable."{4}

Kairos speaks of a quality of life that sees ourselves, others, the world, as significant and worthy of our time, attention, energy, resources. Its enemies include pragmatism, doubts about our own significance, an absence of a long view of things, and, even more so, no eternal view—no understanding of what gives our lives eternal significance.

The old cry was "Carpe diem!" "Seize the day!" Someone might wonder, seize it for what? If nothing lasts, if nothing has eternal significance, what is the point? It all slips through our fingers and is gone. Seizing the day isn't to be understood as the existentialist's call to experience the moment. The focus on the latter is on fleeting experiences. The hope is that by focusing on those, one can shape one's own life rather than living the life others hand you. But there's nothing eternal about this. I am reminded of Meursault, the protagonist in Albert Camus' *The Stranger,* who believes he lives in an indifferent world, or what *should* be an indifferent world, and wonders why people think anything is really significant. Nothing is of any more value than anything else because it all ends in death. The universe doesn't care.

Which brings me to a specifically Christian view of time as kairos.

My search through the NT showed eighty uses of the word. It's a significant concept in Scripture. The most familiar reference to kairos in the New Testament is probably Eph. 5:15-16: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." The King James used the more familiar phrase, "redeem the time." It means literally to buy up, or rescue from loss, the opportunity, the proper season, the right time. The word kairos is also used in the story of Jesus' temptation in the

wilderness. After Jesus resisted Satan, Luke writes that “he [Satan] left Him until an opportune time” (Lk. 4:13).

What gives significance to our time (and even to chronos time) is that we live in a world created by God who is working out His plan that will be consummated at His appointed time. Theologian James Emery White wrote this: “Kairos moments are never pragmatic moves to ensure a blessed life during our short tenure on earth. They are moments to be seized for the sake of eternity and the Lord of eternity.”{5} Good works have been prepared for us to do (Eph. 2:10), and we should apply ourselves because they matter beyond the grave.

So, how do we do it? How does one live in kairos time in a world governed by chronos? Others want me to think of time the way they do, as openings in my schedule that can be filled with something else. I have responsibilities in my job and with my family and church that require keeping a calendar.

We aren’t going to return to an agrarian society like that of the Middle Ages. And our lives *are* intertwined with others’. We *can,* however, do something about it. For starters, we can be more aware of how we use the time that *is* truly ours. Are we doing useful things? That doesn’t mean to fill our time with “meaningful busyness.” There’s a proper time for rest as well as for work, for creativity as well as for chores. Changing a mindset and habits takes practice. Little by little we can “re-color” our lives.

More significantly, however, is a fundamental change in our thinking about the importance of the things we do. Few of us will become Martin Luther Kings or Winston Churchills. But we—you and I—are important, and we touch the lives of important people. Not all kairos times have to be of society wide significance. The main point is that life and what we do with it, even in the details, is rich with significance and meaning. We can make a difference in this world, in others’ lives, if we’ll but seize the opportunities while they are

present.

Notes

1. Mark Freier, Whatif Enterprises.
2. Daniel Clendenin, "When Chronos Meets Kairos, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, 2006."
3. Alternate spelling for "chronos"
4. Freier.
5. James Emory White, *Life Defining Moments: Daily Choices with the Power to Transform Your Life* (Waterbrook Press, 2001), 97; quoted by Mark Freier.

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Exploring God's Relationship to Time

Written by David Pattillo and Michael Gleghorn

Introduction

Why does time flow the way it does? Can we alter time, or is it beyond our grasp? Is time travel possible? Is God inside or outside of time? Does everyone experience time the same way we do? When faced with the question, What is time? we encounter one of the most fundamental human inquiries, as well as one of the most difficult philosophical questions. Every person seems to experience the flow of time every single day, yet when asked to define it, we are often at a loss for words. Thus, for the purpose of this article, we shall define time as a relation of events involving earlier than and later than.

Two views of time

When it comes to the philosophy of the nature of time, there are essentially two views: the *dynamic, tensed,* or *A Theory;* and the *static, tenseless,* or *B Theory*. It is traditionally said that on the *A Theory*, the present is ontologically privileged. That is to say, the present is the only thing that is really real; the past has happened and the future will happen. It is much easier to see what distinguishes the *A Theory* when it is compared with the *B Theory*, which holds that all moments are equally real. That is (according to the *B Theory*), from our perspective it is 2007, 1950 is in the past and 2050 is in the future. But for the people in 1950 (who also exist at *that* time), both 2007 and 2050 are in the future. Likewise, for the people in 2050 both 1950 and 2007 are in the past. The *B Theory* holds that it is ignorant to think of our moment of the world as the real moment, or the moment occupying some privileged position. According to the *B Theory*, any tensed idea, or sentence whose verb has tense (i.e., past/present/or future), would actually be more accurate if it were translated into a tenseless idea or sentence (i.e., one that has a tenseless verb and time stamp to say when something happened, rather than a tensed verb) since tensed ideas imply that the present moment of time is superior to, or more real than, all other moments. For instance, according to the *B Theory*, the tensed sentence, JFK was assassinated, would misconstrue reality as if the year 2007 (or any year after 1963) is more real or significant than the years 1907 or 1963, because it has a verb in the past tense. This theory holds that the sentence would be better put On November 22, 1963, at 12:30 P.M. CST JFK *is* assassinated.{2} This tenseless sentence is preferred on the *B Theory* because there is no moment that can claim to be the true present moment; rather, there are just equally real moments. Advocates of the *B Theory* say that reality is one long 4-dimensional block, and we are just experiencing one moment of that block, but all the moments are equally real or

existent. The *A Theory*, on the other hand, would say that *tensed verbs* (verbs in the past/present/future tense) do reflect reality; there really is a past, present, and future, and they are always changing as time flows and the future becomes present and then past.

Which one of these views is correct has vast implications for the way we interpret reality. For example, it will have an effect on the way we understand God and His relation to the world. One might think that this would be the proper time to turn to Scripture to see whether it supports an *A* or *B Theory*. However, its important to recognize the fact that Scripture is not entirely clear with respect to this issue. Therefore, we will postpone looking at the Bible until our discussion of Gods relation to time. For the present, we need to discuss which of the two theories is superior and why.

A vs. B

The most powerful argument for the *A Theory* is its intuitiveness. That is, we experience the flow of time in just as real a way as any other experience in our lives. We very directly experience the present. To say that event e is occurring now is no different than saying that event e is occurring.{3} When we look forward to the future or regret the past, we are experiencing the *A Theory* because, if you think about it, on the *B Theory* there is no difference between past, present, and future.{4} Lastly, when a kid says: I wish it were Christmas morning, or I wish I were already done with this test, he is expressing the *A Theory*. That is, he wishes that the present moment, say t_1, were replaced by some other moment, say t_2. This expresses the idea of *temporal becoming* (the idea that the present moment changes as we pass through time), which is an experience of the *A Theory*. As William Lane Craig puts it, We thereby presuppose the reality of temporal becoming, since our wish expresses our belief in a changing and objective present.{5} Thus the *A Theory* very comfortably

coheres with what we experience in everyday life.

Now, the B theorist may ask, Why accept this experience as anything more than an illusion? To answer this we must briefly digress with a discussion of Alvin Plantingas *epistemology*, or theory of knowledge. When evaluating beliefs, many skeptics want to reject anything that is not certain. This was especially prominent in the philosophy of Ren Descartes, who rejected all his sense experience because it could have been wrong. After all, when you think about it, we could be in the *Matrix*.{6} It could be that everything you think is real is just electrical impulses interpreted by your brain. Or it could be that the world was created five minutes ago, and you were created with all the memories you currently have. Or maybe you are the only mind in the universe, and everyone else is just a robot, cleverly designed to give the appearance of having a human mind. And the list of possibilities goes on and on. None of these can be disproven, but should we conclude that we really dont know whether anyone else actually exists? Plantinga doesnt think so. He has developed a theory that labels these and other similar beliefs as *properly basic beliefs*.

Think about it this way. If you are reading this online, the belief that there is a computer in front of you is properly basic; that is, it is a foundational belief formed in correct circumstances. Therefore, you are warranted in believing it until presented with some *defeater* of your belief. In this case, a *defeater* would have to be some good reason to believe that your senses are deceiving you. In other words, according to Plantinga, common sense beliefs about sensory experience, memory, the existence of other minds or other similar beliefs should be regarded as innocent until proven guilty (i.e., judged reliable until proven otherwise). Likewise, our experience of real temporal passing and an objective past, present, and future warrants belief in the *A Theory* until a strong counterargument is offeredstrong enough to cause us to

doubt this experience.

Another major argument for the *A Theory* is what is known as the *ineliminability of tense*.{7} Simply put, this is the idea that tensed statements imply tensed facts which further imply a tensed reality. B theorists have made numerous attempts to show that tensed sentences can be translated into tenseless sentences that do not imply a tensed reality. However, all these attempts have failed. Craig illustrates:

> *This point is underlined by the ineptness of some of the supposed tenseless translations of tensed sentences. Take, for example, the tensed sentence It is now 4:30. We can imagine situations in which a persons life would depend on his holding such a belief. But the tenseless counterpart of this sentence is either It is 4:30 at 4:30, which is a mere tautology, or It is 4:30 simultaneous with this utterance, which is useless unless we also know that This utterance is occurring now, which is a tensed belief. In both cases the tenseless versions are insufficient to motivate timely action because they do not inform us whether or not it actually is 4:30.{8}*

If tensed sentences lose some meaning when translated into tenseless sentences, then there is some important meaning in tense, namely, that reality is reflected by tense. Therefore, if tenseless sentences cannot capture the facts expressed by tensed sentences, then there must be tensed facts. And thus we have a strong argument for temporal reality.

Next we turn our attention to some problems with the *B Theory* of time. While there are numerous problems, we will discuss just two of them.{9} First, the *B Theory* of time greatly misconstrues some biblical ideas, one example being the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*. For the B theorist, the universe beginning to exist simply means that it has a starting point, just like a yard stick has a first

inch.{10} The problem is that on this view There is in the actual world no state of affairs of God existing alone without the space-time universe. God never really brings the universe into being; as a whole it co-exists timelessly with Him.{11} So while the universe depends on God, the idea of *creation ex nihilo* is severely stripped of meaning since the universe always timelessly exists with God. That is, in some sense, God and space-time seem to be equally necessary in their existence.

The other major biblical problem is that evil is never really vanquished.{12} On the static theory of time [*B Theory*], evil is never really vanquished from the world: It exists just as sturdily as ever at its various locations in space-time, even if those locations are all earlier than some point in cosmic time (for example, Judgment Day).{13}

Furthermore, events like the crucifixion are never past or done away with. They simply remain timelessly forever, which seems hard to reconcile with Christs victory over death.

A second argument against the *B Theory* has to do with the impossibility of the existence of *actual infinites*. It has now been almost universally agreed upon by mathematicians and philosophers that an actually infinite number of things cannot be actualized in the space-time universe. The idea of *actual infinites* creates many paradoxes. For instance, what is infinity minus infinity? Well mathematically one gets contradictory answers. For example, one could say that the answer is infinity. But the answer could also be 4, or 0, or any other number you want. This led the great mathematician David Hilbert to say, The infinite is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature, nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought…the role that remains for the infinite to play is solely that of an idea.{14}

Thus, what we have in the space-time universe are not *actual infinites*, but *potential infinites*. For example, you can start

counting 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and continue this process for a potentially infinite time (i.e., you can keep going as long as you want). But you will never reach a moment when you can stand up and exclaim, Im done! Ive counted to infinity! In the same way a line three inches in length can be divided in half, and then in half again, and then in half again, ad infinitum. But it can never actually be divided an infinite number of times. For this reason, in addition to compelling scientific and theological evidence, essentially all philosophers and scientists have now come to believe that time is finite in the past.

However, the future is different. We know that the future is not finite but infinite. We know this both philosophically and biblically by the promise of *everlasting* or *eternal* life. Therefore, most scholars have concluded that the future, like numbers, is potentially infinite. We can keep adding years forever, but we will never reach an end. But this is inconsistent with the *B Theory*. Since every moment of time in fact exists at once, and the future has no end, there is an actually infinite number of years in the future. But since we know that there are no actualized infinites in the real world, we can safely conclude that the *B Theory* is wrong in its description of the future.

So we have seen two strong arguments for the *A Theory*, from our experience of temporal reality and the ineliminability of tense in language, and two ways that the *B Theory* seems clearly implausible, from *creation ex nihilo* and the impossibility of *actual infinites*. Other attempts have been made to revive the *B Theory*, but suffice it to say that they have been answered thoroughly.{15}

Gods Relation to Time

We now turn to how an infinite God relates to our passage of time. There are some things of which we are certain. First, time began a finite time ago. We know this from the Bible,{16}

philosophy,{17} and science.{18} Second, we know God neither began to exist, nor will He ever cease to exist.{19} We can further conclude that God existed before time.{20} This is best exemplified in Jude 25: …To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, *before all time* and now and forever. Amen.{21}

Since we know that God existed before time,{22} we can conclude that without the universe, God existed timelessly.{23}

We then must ask ourselves, how does God relate to the universe since it began? Here again we find two common positions. One is that God is timeless. By this it is meant that God, while the creator and sustainer of the world, was not affected by the creation of the world and remains constant outside the universe, just as He was before the act of creation. The other common position is that God is *temporal*. That does not mean that God is limited by time, but rather that He is intimately related to temporal things. He thus has a past, present, and future, just like other temporal things. Since there is no beginning or end to His existence, this position is also sometimes called *omnitemporality*.

There are two main arguments in favor of Gods *omnitemporality*. First, there is the argument from Gods relation to the universe. When God brought the universe into being, He stood in new relationships that He did not have before. Once the universe exists, He now is the sustainer of and is co-existent with the universe.{24} He could have remained timeless, but since He created the universe He went through an *extrinsic change*.{25} If God undergoes this change, then surely He must be temporal. That is, we can speak of a past, present and future for God. In the past He had one relation and in the present He has another relation. This provides a way to associate God with time, and that is all the omnitemporal view of God requires.

The second major argument for Gods *omnitemporality* comes from

His omnisciencespecifically, His knowledge of tensed facts.{26} That is, as the present is constantly changing, true sentences are constantly changing. For instance, there are tenseless truths that are always true such as: The World Trade Centers *are* attacked on September 11, 2001. However, on September 10, 2001, the sentence The World Trade Centers will be attacked tomorrow was true, but this statement is not true on September 11th. What is true on September 11th is the statement, The World Trade Centers are being attacked today. Finally, any time since then, the true statement has been, The World Trade Centers were attacked on September 11th. All of these statements can be true or false depending on when they are made. That is because the verbs relate the sentence to the present. Thus, a God who knows only tenseless truths (as the *tenseless view* of God proposes) would seem to be very ignorant indeed, for there are seemingly limitless things He would not know. However, if God does possess knowledge of the truth of tensed sentences, this would seem to make Him temporal. As Dr. Craig puts it, any being which does know tensed facts cannot be timeless, for his knowledge must be in constant flux, as the tensed facts known by him change.{27} Thus we have a second powerful argument for God being temporal .

On the other hand, the major argument for Gods timelessness is what is known as the *incompleteness of temporal life*.{28} This is the idea that temporal life is so limited that a perfect God would not experience it. Certainly the fleetingness of our own lives has led to many existential questions of the meaning of life given that it will all end relatively shortly. Surely God would not be limited in this way. Well, this is a plausible argument and does carry some weight, but I am not sure how much. For one thing, because of Gods complete omniscience and ability to experience whatever He wants, the past is never really lost to God, which makes temporality far less of a limitation. Secondly, since He never ends, and we His children never cease to be in company with Him (assuming

we have received His free gift of eternal life), there really is no need for Him to try to grasp onto fleeting moments as we so often do. So, while this argument seems plausible, it does not seem to me to be remotely powerful enough to call into question the powerful arguments we have for the *omnitemporality* of God.

Thus, it seems we have good reason to think that God is timeless without creation and temporal since creation.{29} But it is important to remember that He did not have to create. Rather, His free decision to create a temporal world also constitutes a free decision on His part to exist temporally.{30} Many would now ask how it makes sense for God to exist timelessly and then temporally. It seems plausible to say that time is a relation of events. That is, Gods existence without creation was just simple, unchanging Trinitarian perfection, and it does not make sense to talk about before and after when there was no change. However, at the moment of the creation, we now have an event, and we can start relating events by temporal distance from the creation. Thus we conclude that God existed timelessly, and then created time and space, giving us the first mark of time, and time has been flowing ever since.

So then, we have seen that there is a real past, present, and future. God, though timeless, created, thus giving us temporal relations. We can speak of past, present, and future for God since He is intimately related to temporal things and has temporal knowledge. Since the first event, we now have a flow of time that will never end as we live on into eternity with or without God.

Notes

1. I owe a great credit to both Dr. William Lane Craig for most of the ideas of this paper, and to Michael Gleghorn for help in developing these ideas.
2. I have picked up Dr. William Lane Craig's use of italics to

symbolize a tenseless verb.
3. William Lane Craig. *Time and Eternity, Exploring God's Relationship to Time.* (Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois) 133.
4. Ibid., 136.
5. Ibid., 140.
6. Reference to the 1999 film *The Matrix*, in which a complex computer program used unconscious humans to power, and thus perpetuate itself. Human brains were meanwhile tied to an imaginary world, the matrix.
7. Ibid., 115.
8. Ibid., 118.
9. Ibid., 188-215 for a more comprehensive list of the problems.
10. Ibid., 210.
11. Ibid., 213.
12. Ibid., 214.
13. Ibid.
14. *Philosophy of Mathematics*, ed. with an Intro. by Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam (Prentice-Hall, 1964) p. 151.
15. Ibid., 143-188.
16. Gen 1:1; Ps 90:2; Jn 1:1-3; I Cor 2:7; Jude 25.
17. This is supported by arguments and illustrations about the impossibility of the existence of actual infinites (e.g. Hilbert's hotel, etc.). Also, it has been noted that if time never began, we could never reach our current moment. You cannot count up to infinity by adding one number at a time. If the past was infinite, and we only complete one year at a time, we would never reach 2007.
18. This is supported by the second law of thermodynamics, as well as by arguments for the Big Bang (e.g., the red shift of light from distant galaxies and the cosmic microwave background radiation). For more information see *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* by William Lane Craig.
19. name="text19″>That God is the beginningless cause of the universe is the conclusion of the Kalam Cosmological argument. Also see Gen 1:1, Ps 90:2, Is 41:4, Is 57:15, John 1:1-3, II Tim 1:9, Rev 4:8.

20. name=”text20″>I Cor 2:7, Jn 17:24, Jude 25. See also the conclusions from the Kalam Cosmological argument.
21. name=”text21″>The Bible, New American Standard Version (Zondervan, Grand Rapids) 2000, emphasis added.
22. name=”text22″>I say before here to mean God’s existing without time, even though it is actually impossible to speak of before time since before is a temporal relation.
23. Some, like Newton, have proposed that God existed in His own infinite past separate from the creation of physical time. However, I feel that this fails to cohere with the biblical and philosophical evidence.
24. William Lane Craig. *Time and Eternity*, Exploring God’s Relationship to Time. (Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois) 87.
25. Ibid., 87. When a being goes through an extrinsic change, the change does not effect the being’s nature. The idea of an extrinsic change is the idea of a change apart from you. For instance, I can be behind you in line and then cut in front of you. You never changed, but you went through extrinsic relational changes in that you were related to me by the in front of relation and now you are related to me by the behind relation.
26. Ibid., 98.
27. Ibid., 99.
28. Ibid., 67.
29. Ibid., 241.
30. Ibid., 87.

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Time and Busyness

It has, perhaps, always been true that “time is money.” But for the current generation, this maxim has a new twist. In the

frenetic 90s, time has become even more scarce than money and therefore more valuable. As with any commodity, the law of supply and demand determines value. In the last two decades, free time has grown scarce and hence has become a valuable possession.

The 1990s is the decade of the time famine. Leisure time, once plentiful and elastic, is now scarce and elusive. People seeking the good life are finding it increasingly difficult to enjoy it, even if they can afford it. What money was in the 1980s, time has become in the 1990s.

According to a Lou Harris survey, the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American has shrunk 37 percent since 1973. A major reason is an expanding workweek. Over this same period, the average workweek (including commuting) has increased from fewer than 41 hours to nearly 47 hours. And in many professions, such as medicine, law, and accounting, an 80-hour week is not uncommon. Harris therefore concludes that "time may have become the most precious commodity in the land."

The Technology of Time

Our current time crunch has caught most people off-guard. Optimistic futurists in the 1950s and 60s, with visions of utopia dancing in their heads, predicted Americans would enjoy ample hours of leisure by the turn of the century. Computers, satellites, and robotics would remove the menial aspects of labor and deliver abundant opportunities for rest and recreation.

The optimists were partly right: computers crunch data at unimaginable speeds, orbiting satellites cover the globe with a dizzying array of messages, and robots zap together everything from cars to computer chips at speeds far exceeding their human counterparts. Yet these and other technological feats have not freed Americans from their labors. Most people

are busier than ever.

It wasn’t supposed to be this way. Testimony before a Senate subcommittee in 1967 predicted that “by 1985, people could be working just 22 hours a week or 27 weeks a year or could retire at 38.” The major challenge facing people in the 1990s should have been what to do with all the leisure time provided by our technological wizardry.

Instead, technology has been more of an enemy than an ally. “Technology is increasing the heartbeat,” says Manhattan architect James Trunzo, who designs automated environments. “We are inundated with information. The mind can’t handle it all. The pace is so fast now, I sometimes feel like a gunfighter dodging bullets.”

Actually, the problem isn’t so much technology as it is the heightened expectations engendered by it. The increased speed and efficiency of appliances, computers, and other machines have enabled us to accomplish much more than was possible in previous decades. But this efficiency has also fostered a desire to take on additional responsibilities and thereby squeeze even more activities into already crammed calendars.

As the pace of our lives has increased, over-commitment and busyness have been elevated to socially desirable standards. Being busy is chic and trendy. Pity the poor person who has an organized life and a livable schedule. Everyone, it seems, is running out of time.

Time-Controlling Devices

It is little wonder that most of the products now being developed are not so much time-savers as they are time-controllers. Most of the appliances developed in the 1950s—vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, mixers—were designed to save time and remove drudgery from housework. By comparison, most of the products developed in the 1980s—VCRs, answering

machines, automatic tellers—were time- controllers. These devices do not save much time, but they do allow harried consumers to use their time more effectively.

Technological efficiency has also increased competition. Labor- saving devices that are supposed to make life easier frequently force people to work harder. Baby boomers who are intensely competing with one another for jobs and prestigious promotions avidly employ the latest equipment to give them an edge. Faxes, LANs, car phones, and laptop computers are viewed as necessities if one is to remain competitive.

But technology isn't enough. So most professionals, especially those in service industries such as law, accounting, and advertising, work long hours in an effort to meet their clients' seemingly endless needs and demands. Other baby boomers feel trapped in the same rat race because economic pressures make it nearly impossible to support a family on one income.

The work ethic seems out of control. In the frenetic dash for success or just plain survival, leisure time becomes a scarce commodity. "My wife and I were sitting on the beach in Anguilla on one of our rare vacations," recalls architect James Trunzo, "and even there my staff was able to reach me. There are times when our lives are clearly leading us."

No Time to Talk

Everywhere, it seems, people are over-scheduled and over-committed. Workers are weary. Parents are preoccupied. And children and family relationships are often neglected.

A recent survey by Cynthia Langham at the University of Detroit found that parents and children spend only 14.5 minutes per day talking to each other. That is less time than a football quarter and certainly much less time than most people spend commuting to work.

She says that many people are shocked to hear the 14.5-minutes statistic. But once they take a stopwatch to their conversations, they realize she is right.

But that 14.5 minute statistic is misleading, since most of that time is squandered on chitchat like “What’s for supper?” and “Have you finished your homework?” Truly meaningful communication between parent and child unfortunately occupies only about two minutes each day. Langham concludes, “Nothing indicates that parent-child communications are improving. If things are changing, it’s for the worse.”

She points to two major reasons for this communication breakdown. First is a change in the workforce. A few decades ago the dinner table was a forum for family business and communication. But now, when dinner-time rolls around, Dad is still at work, Mom is headed for a business meeting, and sister has to eat and run to make it to her part-time job. Even when everyone is home, there are constant interruptions to meaningful communication.

The second reason for poor parent-child communication is the greatest interruption of all: television. Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell has reported a forty-year decline in the amount of time children spend with their parents, and much of the recent loss is due to television. TV sabotages much of the already-limited time families spend together. Meals are frequently eaten in front of the “electronic fireplace.” After dinner, talk-starved families gather to watch congenial television families with good communication skills, like the Huxtables on the Cosby show.

While some television shows deal with issues families might discuss (drugs, pregnancy, honesty), few families take advantage of these opportunities to talk about the dilemmas portrayed on the programs and provide moral instruction.

The greeting card business has developed a whole new product

line for busy parents and children. More and more children are finding cards in their backpacks or under their pillows that proclaim, “Have a good day at school,” or lament, “I wish I were there to tuck you in.”

The effect of time pressures on the family has been devastating. Yale psychology professor Edward Ziglar somberly warns that “as a society, we’re at the breaking point as far as family is concerned.”

Homemaking and child- rearing are full-time activities. When both husband and wife work, maintaining a home and raising a family becomes difficult. In the increasing numbers of single-parent households, the task becomes next to impossible.

Someone has to drive car pools, make lunches, do laundry, cope with sick kids and broken appliances, and pay the bills. In progressive homes, household tasks are shared as the traditional husband/wife division of labor breaks down. In others, super-Mom is expected to step into the gap and perform flawlessly.

Inevitably, children are forced to grow up quickly and take on responsibilities they should never have to shoulder. Some children are effectively abandoned—if not physically, at least emotionally- -and must grow up on their own. Others are latch-key kids who are forced to mature emotionally beyond their years. These demands take their toll and create what sociologist David Elkind has called the “hurried child” syndrome.

Time, or rather our lack of it, is severely hurting families. Nurturing suffers when families do not have time to communicate and parents do not have time to instruct their children. In the end, the lack of time takes its toll on the stability of our families.

Never Enough Time

A 1989 survey done by *Family Circle* documented the loss of time in families, especially for working mothers. The article, entitled “Never Enough Time?” began: “Remember ‘quality time’? In the 1980’s that was what you sandwiched in for the children between the office and the housework. We all learned how valuable time was in the school of hard knocks. Life was what happened while we were busy making other plans, to paraphrase ex-Beatle John Lennon.” That was then.

A resounding 71 percent of those surveyed said their lives had gotten busier in the previous year. Nearly a third attributed this increase in busyness to expanding work loads at the office, the demands of a new job, or the pressures of starting a business or returning to work. Not only were the women working longer hours, but many were also working on weekends, and nearly a third often took work home.

Dual-income couples reported major difficulties finding time for each other. Negotiating schedules and calendar-juggling were daily activities. Three out of four women in the survey reported that finding enough time to be alone with their husbands was “often” or “sometimes” a major stress in their relationships. When asked, “In a time crunch, who gets put on the back burner?” half said friends, then husbands, and then other family members.

Those hit hardest by time pressures were single parents. One single mother with two teenagers in Illinois wrote: “I am responsible for a house and yard, work 40 hours a week, take college classes, run a local support group for divorced and widowed women and am involved with a retreat group through church. I have time because I *make* time.”

Often the first thing women will let slide is housekeeping. A full 82 percent said they had changed their standards of cleaning and organizing a house. When asked why, 49 percent

said other things are more important, 42 percent said they were more relaxed about letting chores wait, 35 percent said they had one or more young children, and 23 percent said they had taken a paying job.

Organization expert Stephanie Winston says that the young generation of working women has reframed expectations about household responsibilities. She says, “Their sense of what is expected of them is really very different from what was expected 10 years ago, when women joining the work force had been raised on the old model—rearing the family, cooking, cleaning and the proverbial white-glove test.” But whether they were in the work force or full- time homemakers, more than half of the women surveyed were either “very” or “somewhat” dissatisfied with the amount of time they have alone. Only 30 percent try to set aside four or more hours a week just for themselves. Another 30 percent carve out two to three hours. But 19 percent say they give themselves an hour or less a week, and 20 percent do not allot themselves any leisure time at all.

The time pressure on women and families is significant. The time crunch is squeezing out meaningful communication and important time to think and reflect. The additional time will not come without changes in our lifestyles.

Redeeming the Time

Time, or the lack of it, will continue to dominate our thinking through the 1990s. All of us are in the midst of a time crunch—the solution is to recognize our priorities and apply them rigorously to our lives.

First, we must establish biblical priorities in our lives. Often our busyness is merely a symptom of a deeper problem, such as materialism. In Luke 12, Jesus illustrated this danger with the parable of the rich fool. He says, “The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning

to himself, saying, `What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, `This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods, laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."' But God said to him, `You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'"

There are a number of applications we can derive from this passage. First, we should make sure that we are not so involved in the affairs of the world that we neglect the affairs of the spirit. To turn the familiar adage around, we can be so earthly-minded we are no heavenly good.

Second, we should ask ourselves if we are tearing down productive resources for a more luxurious lifestyle. If a three-bedroom house is sufficient, are we selling it merely to move up to a four- bedroom house? If the car we are currently driving is fine, are we nevertheless eager to trade it in on a newer or more expensive model? Often our indulgences constrain our time and financial resources.

This observation leads to our second biblical principle: fight materialism in our lives. Proverbs 28:20 says "He who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished." Materialism brings with it a haste to get rich. Materialistic people are not patient people. They want what they want, when they want it, and they want it now.

Often our lack of time is tied to our haste to get rich, to feed our greed. We need to ask ourselves the fundamental question, How much do we really need? If we fight materialism in our lives and cut back on the lavishness of our lifestyle, we might be surprised how much time we will free up.

A third biblical principle is to redeem the time. Ephesians 5:15-16 says "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise

men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” Colossians 4:5 says, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, redeeming the time.”

Unlike many of the other resources God has given us, time is not renewable. We may lose money, but we can always earn more. We may lose our possessions, but we can always acquire new ones. But time is a non-renewable commodity. If we squander our time, it is lost forever.

All of us, but especially Christians, must carefully manage the time that God has given us. It is a valuable resource, and we can either spend it on ourselves or redeem it as a spiritual investment. We can spend it only once, and how we spend it can have eternal consequences. Let us not waste the resources God has given us. Instead, let us redeem the time and use it for God’s glory.

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