

Sinner, O Why So Thoughtless Grown?

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Sinner, O why so thoughtless grown?
Why in such dreadful haste to die;
Daring to leap to worlds unknown,
Heedless against thy God to fly?

Will ye frustrate eternal grace,
Urged on by sin's fantastic dreams,
Madly attempt the infernal gate,
And force thy passage to the flames?

Stay, sinner, on the gospel plains,
Behold the God of love unfold
The mystery of his dying pains,
For ever telling, yet untold.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Devotion

Kevin T. Bauder

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Time is limited. Earthly life ends with a period or even an exclamation point, not with an ellipsis. We are granted threescore and ten years, or, if strong enough, fourscore. Anything beyond that is an excess of superabundance.

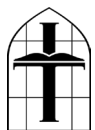
Eighty years. That number lends each person 29,200 days. If a day were a dollar, we would not even start with enough money to buy a house—only perhaps a middle-class car. It is not a lot of money, and 29,200 days is not a lot of time.

We spend about a quarter of that time just growing up. Twenty years goes into getting ready for the next sixty. If we intend to spend our lives in one of the skilled professions, our preparation might take as much as another decade—and, of course, some measure of decay and inability may beset our later years. At best, our useful contribution will span only six decades.

Of that sixty years, we will typically spend about twenty sleeping. Some of us require a bit more rest, and a few can get by on less. But we are now down to only 14,600 days during which we can make a difference.

The business of earning a living will consume a good bit of that time. Few of us can provide for ourselves in fewer than eight hours per day and five days per week. Many will find themselves spending ten or more hours per day on six days of the week. Granted, most people retire at around sixty-five, and most people get a couple of weeks off for vacation. Even so, we shall typically spend a minimum of around 2,083 days pursuing the means of life. That leaves us with about 12,517 days.

How much of that time do we spend driving back and forth to work? Eating our meals or caring for personal hygiene? Shopping for groceries? Doing home repair? Filing our taxes? Visiting the doctor or dentist? Renewing our car registration and driver's license? Few of us could cram these and similar activities into less than two hours every day—and there goes another five years, or 1,826 days. Only 10,691 days are left.



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So we have been loaned just over ten thousand days that we may choose to use as we wish. On the scale of human history, this is a very generous number—most people at most times in most places have enjoyed nothing like it. Ten thousand golden days that we can consider leisure. We may spend these days on amusement, recreation, entertainment, avocation, service, or study. If we are Christians, however, we shall also wish to spend significant amounts of this time in devotion.

(Someone may ask, What about family time? The short answer is that family time is not typically a use of time on its own. What we call “family time” does not consist in families just sitting around and looking at each other. It is time spent together in some way, doing something. Family time will almost always be classified under one of the foregoing categories.)

How much time does devotion require? The answer to that question depends on how devoted we wish to become. Mere Sunday morning church-going will consume no more than 260 days—less than one percent of our lives. Those who take church membership seriously, however, and who actually participate in the life of Christ’s body, will discover that their corporate worship, fellowship, and instruction fills something like triple that amount, and perhaps much more.

Furthermore, the life of devotion is not lived only through corporate meetings and activities. Just as important is each individual’s direct communion with God. This communion involves a number of exercises. One is the reading of Scripture, not simply for doctrinal study but to meet God and to hear His voice. Another is personal adoration of the Triune God. Still another brings us into periodic self-examination: methodical inspection of our lives for the presence of unconfessed sins, resulting in their confession before God. Petition, supplication, and intercession are important aspects of personal communion with God. So is meditation, the pondering of spiritual truth to consider its importance and implications. Many have found delight in the simple exposure of the soul to God, not so much to verbalize to Him as simply to enjoy Him.

What time do these activities take? For someone who truly delights in God, they can easily consume every moment of leisure. In fact, they tend to spill out of leisure and to form a halo around all other activities of life—which may be what Paul is talking about when he says to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Those who truly devote themselves to God may find that all of life becomes prayer because it is lived in His presence and for His glory.

For such persons, odd moments become holy times. A walk under the open sky becomes a service of meditation and adoration. A wakeful night is transformed into a liturgy of praise and petition. For these people, the question is not “How much time must I take,” but “How much time can I find?”

The importance of devotion does not diminish the value of other uses of time. Our vocation includes prayer, but prayer is not our entire vocation. The life lived before God still has occasion for the right kinds of recreation, study, conversation, entertainment, and service. But a life lived without devotion is not yet a Christian life. Indeed, compared to what it could be, it is hardly a life at all.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
