



## The Right Time

### Bible Study

### Leader's Guide

**[Please provide:** Bibles, hymnals, a copy of this study for each participant, and an accompanist if you wish to sing the hymn verses included in this study.]

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* Galatians 4:4–5

**Opening Hymn:** Read or sing together, “O Sing of Christ,” verses 1 and 2 (LSB 362).

**Opening Prayer:** Lord of Time and God of the Church, we come to You to ask You to guide us in understanding the moments of our lives. Bless us with wisdom to trust Your providence, by caring for us in all that is necessary for this life, and all that is needed for the life to come. Teach us to trust You for Your timing in our lives, including how and when You bring Your gifts of care to us. Guide us in faith and faithfulness as Your children. Remind us that at the right time, You sent Jesus Christ into the world, so that You could redeem the lost and protect the elect, through Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen

Chronology is “moving time.” We speak of how time flies, because we cannot change its flow. Seconds become minutes; hours become days; weeks and months become years; centuries become millennia. The passage of time is essential to our lives.

### Thinking About Time

Why does time fly when we are having fun, and linger while we suffer? Humans understand time by its motion, and waiting is not an easy task for most people. When we want something to happen that is anticipated, we must wait. When we want something to end that we do not enjoy, we must wait. It is important for us to see the “right time” as the moment God has for us in the present, even while we look for something which lies ahead of us. So time flies when we are having fun because we want to savor the moments of joy, prosperity, and peace. Time lingers when we are suffering because we want pain, sorrow, and misery to end quickly.

Read Psalm 90:1–12. In these verses, what does God tell us about Himself in relation to time? God is timeless. We express this attribute of God by calling Him eternal. He is a supernatural being without a beginning or an end. God is unaffected by time because He is immutable, but He works within time, because time is His creation in the world. As humans, our time on earth is limited (v. 10). In verse 12, we are taught to use time to learn of God and to gain wisdom from Him.

What control of time do we have in our lives? In one sense, we have no control over time. It will continue as God has planned, until the Last Day. Seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, and hours become days without our help or encouragement. In another sense, we have control over what we do in the time that is allotted to us. There are 86,400 seconds in each day. That number is fixed. But we may do many things within that time period, so we have an ability to use time wisely, or not.

How can our understanding of time help our understanding of God and His plan? When we grasp the concept that God uses time to bring His grace into the world, we understand His nature and will for us to be content in every time of our life. We trust His goodness. We can always expect His blessing, that is, His presence, His mercy, and His love to be seen in each moment, for He redeems.

Compare Jude 24–25 with the verses you just read from Psalm 90. How is God timeless? Before all time and now and forever, God has purposed to bring life to His beloved children. He desires for us to be perfect before Him and to know joy in His presence. This is possible through faith in Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. God’s plan for our redemption has been, is now, and always will be part of His nature.

Speak or sing together, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” verses 1–5 (LSB 733, TLH 123, LW 180). How do these lyrics reflect the Biblical truths you previously read concerning time? God is eternal (v.1). He has always existed, even before anything was created (v. 3). God’s sense of time is completely different from ours (v. 4). Time is constantly moving. Eventually we will leave this earth, although as those who trust in the Triune God, our life will continue in heaven (v. 5).

### **Moving Time And Moments Of Importance**

Although our lives are marked by the passage of time, most of what we understand has more to do with the moments we deem important in our lives. We see events within time as essential to how our lives are fitted together, and we even note the plan of God in the ways that we grow and in the things that we experience. Physicists speak of time as the fourth dimension, because time and place are often determined by when, as well as by where. This gives us a picture of a proper time, or the “right time.” Let me illustrate this with a story:

As a boy, I went to the frozen lakes of Minnesota with my father, who liked to supplement our diet with fish. I remember being in a dark house, (one of the huts on a lake in winter), with a hole he chipped through the ice, a few decoys hung down into the water, and an eleven point spear that he used to throw at bigger fish when they came into view. The rope from the spear was attached to his leg so that it would not be lost, and he could retrieve the fish. The darkness of the fish house allowed me to see the fish come into view, while sunlight filtered through the ice around us and revealed little fish as well as big ones, swimming beneath us. When the northern pike came into view, I was hushed by his finger to his lips, and as he motioned to me, I stepped back for him. I watched as my dad threw the spear, and retrieved our supper. There was a sense of timing that was needed for his throw to be successful, as well as accuracy, so that both were essential for his purpose to be fulfilled.

Let’s explore what the Bible says concerning God’s sense of timing and His accuracy in His purpose.

How would you describe the difference between moving time (chronology) and the right time (moment of importance)? Answers may vary according to how people understand the concept of time. Moving time is the unstoppable nature of the natural world as God has created it. The right time implies how certain elements have coincided to allow an event to be noteworthy. For example, it is normal for the moon to wax and wane on a monthly cycle. But it is easier to view the stars when the moon is not visible during the period of a new moon. The absence of the moon’s light makes it the right time to see other stars. This opportune time is one that passes as time moves forward.

There are three different Greek words which are used to describe time. One is *chronos*, the word from which we get the concept of chronology. It usually refers to spending time in an activity. Another word,

*kairos* refers to opportunity, or the right time for an event to have impact and become momentous, a “moment of importance.” A third word, *aion* refers to a long amount of completed time, as in an age, epoch or eon, and sometimes refers to “eternity.”

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–17. Describe those things in these verses that show a sense of “moving time.” There is a time for every matter under heaven (v. 1). As time moves on, there will be opportune times for events. Yet, time moving forward is a truth we cannot change.

Describe those things that show a sense of “moments of importance.” All the other events in Ecclesiastes 3:2–8 are considered moments of importance. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, all three Greek words are used in this section of Scripture. Chronos in verse 1, Kairos in vv. 2–8, 11, and 17 and Aion in vv. 11 and 14.

Compare the verses you just read in Ecclesiastes with Psalm 90:1–12 that you read earlier in this study. How can you use the flow of time to bring glory to God? Because time is a gift of God, we are to use this gift to His honor and glory. Instead of succumbing to the temptation to use this gift for our own selfish purposes or in wasteful and wicked ways, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we ask for guidance to use the time God gives us in ways pleasing to Him in service to Him and to others. By the power of the Holy Spirit in response to all that God has done and continues to do for us, we desire to offer Him praise and glory as we worship Him. We especially pray that God would lead us to see and to act upon the opportunities He gives us to share His Gospel message with the world.

Read or sing together, “Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You,” verses 1–3 (LSB 668. TLH 444, LW 303). Why is our time on earth precious? Satan is lurking, trying to destroy us (v. 1). Our time on earth is “fleeting” (v. 3). Jesus promises to be with us and to give us the strength to endure until He takes us to heaven (v. 2).

### **God’s Plan And His Timing**

How does God plan time for our benefit? God has worked to save and deliver all who trust in Christ. Therefore, because God knows and understands the passage of time, and the importance of time, He can use this wisdom to bring blessings to us. He will work within personal lives through His Word and Spirit so that the time of salvation may become part of *our* existence in time, and remain ours through all eternity. This is the revealed knowledge of God in our lives.

God was and is able to work within time to do great miracles: Recall these examples of God’s miraculous might: The sun standing still as Israel fought enemies; the shadow that moved backward up the stairs in the time of Hezekiah; Jonah inside the great fish for three days and his release on dry land; Jesus’ raising Lazarus after four days in the grave; Jesus’s own resurrection from the dead on the third day. God continues to have and use this ability to bring about a “day of salvation” when He gives us faith and rescues us from the clutches of the devil and takes us into His arms. This is the day when we are baptized. God also reminds us of His will and ways by the Holy Spirit through our conscience when events occur in our lives that help us to realize His constant presence with us. This is the natural knowledge of God in our lives.

Read Galatians 4:4–5. Do we know for certain the exact date and time when Jesus was born? The actual birth date of Jesus is not known from history. Scripture tells us he was born before King Herod died in 4 B.C. (or perhaps 2 B.C., depending upon an understanding from Josephus, a Jewish historian). The date of Christmas comes to us as a Christian holiday because another celebration in the Roman world allowed Christians a free day to gather and celebrate the birth of the Savior instead of the growing of the sun (Saturnalia). Most likely, Jesus was born in lambing season (early spring) because the shepherds were

out by night, watching their flocks. It was, and still is, important for shepherds to be available to help ewes as they are lambing. The natural cycle is for sheep to become pregnant in fall and to give birth to lambs in the spring, although the cycle may be changed through aggressive herd management.

Why does Galatians 4:4 call the time when Jesus came to earth the “fullness of time” or “the right time”? The chronology of Jesus’ entrance in to our world is the most important moment in human history. God personally entered our chronological time in Jesus Christ. He took on time, and even death, in order to redeem all those bound by sin and the ravishing effects of time in our world. Consider all that God had caused to coincide with the entrance of His Son Jesus Christ: prophecies made and fulfilled, an unusual star to lead the Wise Men, a darkening of the sun as Jesus died on the cross, an earthquake at Jesus’ resurrection.

What do each of these verses say about God’s timing concerning Jesus’ earthly ministry, as well as His promised mission to save all people from their sins?

Mark 1:15: As Jesus began His earthly ministry, He proclaimed, *the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.*

Romans 3:21–26: Jesus’ actions on our behalf were *to show his righteousness at the present time* (v. 26). “God’s righteousness in Christ is still effective” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, study note on Romans 3:26, page 1915.

Romans 5:6: *At the right time*, Christ died for us, the *ungodly*. This occurred according to God’s perfect timing.

Ephesians 1:7–10: Jesus redeemed us according to the timing God His Father planned. The *fullness of time* in verse 10 refers to “The messianic age [which] began with Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, study note on Ephesians 1:10, page 2017.

1 Timothy 6:11–19: We can be assured that God will choose “the right time” for Jesus’ return on the Last Day.

As we read these Scripture passages, we note how God has control of time to bring about what He desires to accomplish. Time becomes God’s servant in the salvation of the world. God’s timing and accuracy in bringing salvation in Jesus is perfect. At the time, the world had a language which was precise for writing God’s Word, a system of roads that allowed easy travel to foreign nations, and population which would grow in order to reach the most possible people over the next two millennia. Even now, God knows how to work His grace in our world. God’s timing in our life is eternal. It will continue until Jesus’ second coming as well as when we reach our heavenly home in timeless fashion.

Read or sing together, “There Is a Time for Everything,” verse 4 (LSB 762). According to this hymn verse, how is God continuing to use time in our lives? By the power of the Holy Spirit, God has work for us to complete and praises for us to sing to Him.

Why do we say “Hindsight is better than foresight”? This saying reminds us that we cannot know the future. Therefore, it is easier for us to learn from the past than to guess how things will turn out in the time ahead. But God is not limited merely to a knowledge of the past, for He also has knowledge of the future. Therefore, we trust His word as it speaks about our past, present, and future.

Read Romans 8:18–39. Knowing that God perfectly sees the right time, why is it often hard for us to accept His timing? Because of sin, we know hardship and experience suffering. Our sinful nature and Satan’s falsehoods concerning God cause us to doubt God. The pain and suffering we experience distract us from God’s promises. God promises, however, to allow nothing to separate us from Him and from His love for us in Christ Jesus (v. 39).

## **Growing In Time**

Read the following verses and identify the times of growing in our lives that each one describes.

Luke 8:4–15: Jesus uses the parable of the sower to explain how God’s Word grows or doesn’t grow in people’s hearts. As we all experience, our sinful nature, the troubles and hardships which abound in the world, and the devil all resist the growth of God’s Word in our hearts. “By God’s grace, however, our faith not only withstands trial and temptation but even grows stronger” (The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, ©2009, study note on Luke 8:9–15, p. 1725).

Ephesians 5:16: God commands us to make the “best use of the time, because the days are evil.” Our time here on earth is limited and we are not to waste it on foolish pursuits and endeavors that take us away from what God’s will is for us and the growth in His Word that the Holy Spirit works in us.

Which of the growing seasons described in these verses have you experienced in your life? Encourage participants to share with honesty times of growth and some of the more stagnant times in their lives and how, through each, God has continued to grow faith in them.

Read Hebrews 4:14–16. Where in your own life has God used testing at the right time? Trials and temptations provide growing seasons in our lives. What we often refer to as a crisis is an opportunity for God to reveal His time of grace. In difficult times, while we are tempted to doubt God’s faithfulness to us through these tests of faith, God strengthens us and draws us closer to Him. God always encourages us toward faith while the devil, the world, and our sinful nature always lead us to doubt or despair. God uses testing to make us courageous for Him by showing us Christ, who was tempted, yet overcame for us (Matthew 4:1–11; Hebrews 4:15). This is where our testing leads us—to trust in Christ.

## **God’s Timing For Our Future**

We will not have a perfect world until Jesus comes again. Do we long for Him to judge sinners, or do we desire hope for His chosen saints? Can we have perfect joy while sin exists in and around us? These questions help us reflect upon God’s purposes to redeem the world. While we long for redemption, we also understand that the redemption which God plans is for more than just us only. We long for an end to sin, but that also means an end to sinners. Hope for His saints is for Him to bring relief from sin and its effects. The perfect joy His Spirit brings is tainted in our lives by our own sinful flesh, and will not be complete until Jesus comes again in glory.

Read Mark 13: 24–37. What will Jesus return as King of glory be like? Jesus’ return will be magnificent for believers, and terrifying for unbelievers. The Bible speaks of the end of the world as we know it. *Heaven and earth will pass away (v.31)* Angels will gather believers at this time of Christ’s Second Coming to bring them into the Father’s presence. Unbelievers have no promise of rescue, and will suffer consequences for their faithlessness. We are to remain alert and to be ready for Jesus’ return (vv.33–37).

Read Matthew 25:1–12; 31–46 and 2 Peter 3:1–9. How can we be prepared for Jesus’ second coming? The Bible tells us that God Himself seeks to bring us grace. His Word proclaims His love in His

desires and in His actions to rescue sinners. We are prepared for Jesus' return through the faith that God provides us through His Word and Sacraments. God uses these means of grace to build our faith. We respond to God's means of grace in prayer, in worship, in service, and in love. True preparation is to walk by faith. 2 Peter 3:8–9 reassures all believers: *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* In our time of waiting, God works in us to share the Gospel so that all may hear the saving message of Jesus.

Why can we say that our Lord's return will be at "the right time?" No one has the knowledge of God's timing for the Last Day, except God Himself. God's Word tells us the end will come. As we see God's perfect timing in other ways in our life, by faith we trust that Jesus' return will be at "the right" and perfect time as well.

**Closing Prayer:** Read or sing, "The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns," verses 1–5 (LSB 348, LW 26).

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