



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 **Hurry and the Willingness to Be Creatures**
(*Attentive Patience*, pp. 11-18)

Suggested Article:

📖 **Where Does the Time God?**
(*Attentive Patience*, pp. 84-88)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Hurry and the Willingness to Be Creatures

Our hurry reveals our anxiety about time. Yet the days that unfold are not a scarce resource slipping away, although they certainly are finite. Our time is God's terrible, mysterious patience, in which we meet what is beyond us and come to know ourselves as beloved creatures.

Responsive Prayer

Almighty God, we confess we are unwilling—and often, unable—to see the rewards for waiting. We see the dividends of activity. We say, “Time is money.” We find our worth in activity, full calendars, and back-to-back meetings.

We hear the words of the Psalmist:

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.

But we do not wait. Sometimes it is too hard.

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.

Sometimes it is too boring.

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.

Sometimes, we tell ourselves, we simply do not have enough time.

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.

Help us *be still* and *wait* before you. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:21-38

Reflection

Our hurriedness does not move us more quickly toward our goals, but distracts us from painful realities. And it reveals anxiety about time—“fear of losing it, shame about wasting it, ambition to produce more in it than the competitors do, or a struggle just to keep up,” Kelly Johnson notes. “The moral problem of a hurried culture is not its love of speed, but its collective evasion of the truth about ourselves and our world: we are creatures, living in an unfolding time whose purposes we do not create.”

Johnson traces two related evasions that hurried people come to cherish: about the nature of time and about their place in it.

- ▶ *Time has a purpose, but we mask it.* Scripture teaches that God has a purpose for events from the beginning to end of time, though it is mostly mysterious to us (see Ecclesiastes 3:11). In the modern era we have lost sight of this divine purpose (or distracted ourselves from it), and believe “Time is not for anything; it is only the blank page on which human beings write their stories.” Johnson explains, “The sense that time is a raw material to be filled with meaning by human productivity is not a fact, nor even an idea, but a social reality that has evolved through history.” The ways that we mark time—as “universally measurable, predictable, and exchangeable”—both reflects and helps to shape our social imagination.

No wonder we are anxious! We imagine time is “not the course of human life in relation to its Source and End, but an objective, scarce resource” required for our projects. But as this “essential



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and fragile commodity on which whatever we will make of our lives must be built" constantly slips away, we lose "the possibility of making our lives mean something." So, we desperately try to control the uncontrollable!

- ▶ *We have a place in time, but we avoid it.* "When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves," Romano Guardini has written. Thus, our modern purposeless view of time, when stretched by science to the scale of the universe, can leave us in a frightened horror that we are small and meaningless. "We are tempted to cope...by making all the meaning we can in the time we have," Johnson notes.

A Christian can see that the facts point another direction. The world has "intrinsic dignity" that is "grounded in a vastness that is beyond our knowing but is all beloved by God. The world is vast but not meaningless, beyond our knowing but not empty. The time that stretches behind and ahead of us is not ours to control, but it is neither a void nor chaos. It is the gift of God," says Johnson. "To live well in it, we have to begin to encounter both the wildness of creation and the tender intimacy of its Creator to it."

When we begin to think of time and our place in it rightly, we will realize that we are wayfarers "on the road, not at home," Johnson concludes. "We are not industrious entrepreneurs who are building our homes with limited opportunities and maximizing return on raw resources including time, rather we are travelers who are heading for a destination we do not altogether know, but following the road toward it in trust. The wayfarer has to live in the awkward, unrehearsed new encounter of each moment, always incomplete, never quite satisfying, because time is not a possession and not a home. It is the way to fulfillment."

Study Questions

1. Why, according to Kelly Johnson, are we in such a hurry?
2. How did people in Western Europe begin to mark time differently in the late 13th and early 14th centuries? What social arrangements pushed them toward this change, and what effect did the change, in turn, have on their relations to one another and the world?
3. Consider the vast time frame of the physical universe. How must this sheer size appear from the time-as-commodity perspective? How does it look from a perspective that sees time as filled with God's mysterious purpose? In each case, what responses does this fact draw from us?
4. According to Kelly Johnson, how are Simeon and Anna (in Luke 2:21-38) good examples for us concerning how to live as creatures before God in the uncertainty of time?
5. If the hurry in our lives is masking God from us, then we might think the best solution is to take a nice, relaxing vacation. Why is Kelly Johnson suspicious of this plan?

Departing Hymn: "To Know That You Are God"

Hurry and the Willingness to Be Creatures

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 4, and 5	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine how our hurriedness is masking us from the true nature of time and our place in it as God's creatures.
2. To discuss how time came to be reimagined as a scarce commodity.
3. To contrast two responses to the temporal vastness of the universe – from the perspectives of time-as-commodity and of time-filled-with-divine-purpose.
4. To review some spiritual practices that can help us break through to the true purpose of time.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

In a now-famous interview on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, comedian Louis C.K. exclaims "Everything's amazing right now, but nobody's happy!" It's hilarious commentary on our hurried lives, Kelly Johnson notes. "He recounts hearing a man whine when, on a plane traveling through the air at six hundred miles per hour, the high-speed Wi-Fi connection broke down. To people frustrated with their cell phone's surfing speed, he cries: 'Give it a second! It's going to space! It's all unbelievably fast, but it is still not fast enough for us.'"

Johnson continues, "And although we are capable of greater speed than any generation of humans before, in the face of life-threatening crises, we drag our collective feet. We get instantaneous reports of major melting in Antarctica, but global talks to limit greenhouse gasses are stalled. Video coverage of brutality against black bodies goes viral in minutes, while the United States has never commissioned a study of the possibility of reparations for slavery. Companies that trade stocks in milliseconds still have not eliminated the gender wage gap, and our amazing cell phones include metals that may have been mined by slaves, though we thought we left slavery behind in the nineteenth century. How can we be hurrying so much and yet changing so slowly?" (*Attentive Patience*, p. 11)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read responsively the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 2:21-38 from a modern translation.

Reflection

We begin this series of studies on the virtue of patience by examining one of the chief obstacles to developing and practicing patience today – the hurriedness that dominates our lives. What purpose does our hurry serve? It does not move us more quickly to our important goals or make more time available for relationships. Kelly Johnson suggests hurriedness has become an addictive drug that distracts us from realities we'd like to avoid – the real purpose of time, and our place in it. Hurry distracts us from our creatureliness before God.

Members who want to explore other dimensions of hurriedness in modern culture will find helpful resources in Roger Owens's review, "Where Does the Time God?"

Study Questions

1. At times we are forced by circumstances and against our choice to hurry, but often we welcome a hurried lifestyle. "Being in a hurry inflames my sense of the importance of my agenda while it shrinks my attention to a narrow field," Kelly Johnson notes. This narrowing of attention is useful on an important task, but we begin to use it as a stratagem "to avoid painful realities." Johnson thinks hurriedness reveals our "anxiety about time: fear of losing it, shame about wasting it, ambition to produce more in it than the competitors do, or a struggle just to keep up." It's also an "evasion of the truth about ourselves and our world: we are creatures, living in an unfolding time whose purposes we do not create." These two things – the evasion of creatureliness and the anxiety about time – are related: we want to escape our high calling to relationship with God, but despair of making any alternate purpose on our own. "Christianity sees in this struggle the discomfort of a natural creature with a supernatural destiny, a beloved creature broken by sin, a redeemed creature not yet brought to fulfillment," she explains. "Evasion of that discomfort is not the solution."
2. Bells once marked the hours of prayer and reminded people of their relationships to God and to one another before God. The rise of another relationship – market labor – required bells to mark equal periods of time, in order to protect laborers' wages and employers' due. Increasingly people thought of time as a commodity to sell or buy. It had no inherent "worth" or meaning, except that supplied by the purposes of the employer or laborer.
3. Form two groups to consider, "What emotions should humans feel when they consider the vast time frame of the physical universe?" Read Ecclesiastes 3:11 to summarize the biblical view that time has a divine meaning, though it's mostly mysterious to us. Ask one group to respond from the perspective that time is a commodity with no inherent meaning, but it may be given meaning by our individual or communal projects. Ask the other group to answer from a perspective that sees time as filled with God's mysterious purposes. Explore the groups' answers. If they use the same emotion term – e.g., fear – do they mean the same response, with the same object, etc.? If they use different terms – e.g., horror vs. awe – what explains their choices?
4. In the brief vignettes of Simeon and Anna, we meet "people who lived with creaturely trust in the uncertainty of time," Johnson writes. Simeon, filled with the Spirit, trusted he would see the Messiah before he died. "If those days of waiting were frustrating, he did not resort to pretending that God had abandoned him, nor that the Messiah had already come, nor much less that he had to rush to make some meaning for himself before his time ran out. He did not make himself busy, hurrying to avoid his fears for Israel. He waited and watched," Johnson notes. Similarly, the prophet Anna waits patiently for God to redeem Israel. They "clearly understood that they were in a story not of their making. ... They trusted that the full story was in the hands of one who means us good, one way or another. And that trust meant that they were among the few who could act quickly, effectively, and wisely when the new moment demanded it. Their patient attention to the gift of time meant they neither hurried nor delayed, but recognized the gift of each moment already full of meaning."
5. That relaxing vacation sure sounds nice, but it might be just another version of the mask of hurriedness, Johnson warns. It might reinforce our pride, if we think that we deserve a costly, distracting break because "we are the kind of people who have to hurry, who are important, and who do not have time to be concerned with anything other than the very important matters we are racing to address." As an antidote to hurry, she recommends, instead, cultivating "practices of conversation and prayer that require stillness and patience, not to evade reality but to discover it."

Departing Hymn

"To Know That You Are God" is on pp. 55-57 of *Attentive Patience*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.