

Telling Time

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

July 2021 (27 June - 31 July)



Time is strange. *Really* strange. Surely the march of time is completely universal, a grand equaliser, no matter what it passes for everybody at the same rate. Of course it doesn't feel like that — in any given moment it can fly, drag, leap, stand still, spool backwards, and skip forward... Our experience of time passing is so fluid and subjective, dependent on our circumstances...

But then, maybe in our experiences we are on to something as it turns out that physicists like Carlo Rovelli suggest that actually time isn't a fixed external constant in the first place. It's not the same everywhere and for everyone. For instance Rovelli explains in his book *The Order of Time* that time goes faster at high altitude than at sea level: "Two friends separate, with one of them living in the plains and the other going to live in the mountains. They meet up again years later: the one who has stayed down has lived less, aged less, the mechanism of his cuckoo clock has oscillated fewer times. He has had less time to do things, his plants have grown less, his thoughts have had less time to unfold ... Lower down, there is simply less time than at altitude." Time is affected by gravity! Oh and also by the speed we are moving as precise measurements have shown it slows down the faster we go.

So time is pretty strange concept at the best of times. But then it gets weirder. Our whole experience of feeling time pass, of it *flowing*, could be more down to how we ourselves process reality than an external, objective 'time'. What is 'now' for each of us is determined by how we interpret what is coming at us and that takes time for us to process. It turns out there is a lot we still don't know about how time works.

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Apparently when you look at the big picture of general relativity or the microscopic picture of quantum theory there isn't a straightforward universal 'time' like we tend to think of it, time is richer and weirder than that. At one point Rovelli describes time beautifully and confusingly like so: "It has a different rhythm in every different place and passes here differently from there. The things of this world interweave dances made to different rhythms." It's fair to say it's mind melting stuff...

But this past year and a half has given each of us new insights into the mysteries of time. For some of us it has run very fast lived at a frenetic pace, while for many these have been some of the slowest months of our lives. For others time has been stopped altogether by heartbreak, loss of employment or grief. For most of us perhaps life through lockdowns has been a mix of all three, racing, freezing and dawdling.

Time has not always gone in a straight line either. Sometimes the changes in our routines have made us rewind to a different, perhaps simpler time. Or we have been fast forwarding to a transformed future, utopian or dystopian depending on the day. If time can go sideways it has done that too giving us a glimpse of alternative realities: socially, economically and ecologically.

Each month at Sanctuary First we come to the Bible with our questions, our longings and our hopes. We open ourselves up anew to what these ancient words are saying to us today in the very midst of our lives *now* (whenever that is...). This month we want to tackle time itself. It's that gap that lies between how the Bible came about and now. Between the creation of everything and the end of this sentence. Between Christ's ultimate gesture of love and sacrifice and our heartfelt prayers today. These gaps can seem colossal... but our God is outside of time. God can reach through our experience of time unfolding and find us right here, right now. The Bible is a whirlwind, a library of books that bursts into history and reverberates continually. The Cross is a profound event that resonates for all time. In the passing of an instant we can brush close to eternity. The Kingdom is at hand.

So over these summer days, which stretch out longer up in Scotland, we are going to be meditating on time. We will be thinking about what it means to live through time, how we can begin to access a reality beyond time, and what our experience of time can tell us about the wonder and generosity of God.

As they say, time will tell.

These discussion questions adapt our monthly themes for small Connect Groups or personal Bible study (look up the [Telling Time Resource Pack PDF](#) for more information on this month's theme). The questions are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. They are offered as a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests you or your group.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1: Mornings

Conversation starter

Are you a morning person or a night person? Lark or night owl? Or neither? Maybe you're a midday person!

What time of day do you tend to pray? Do you pray about different things in the morning and in the evening?



Read Genesis 1: 14-19

Day after day after day...

Why not 24/7 dazzling light? Why have *days* and *nights* with different light levels?

Read Mark 5: 21-43

Waking up the next day...

What happened next do you think for the suffering girl and the suffering woman after their encounters with Jesus? What was their first thought on waking up the next day do you think?

Read Lamentations 3: 22-33

Mercy me...

What are the mercies, the little things, that are new each morning that you are grateful for in your life?

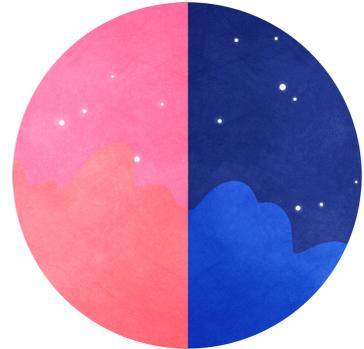
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Part 2: Year on year

Conversation starter

Our phones and social media accounts often have a startling feature when they send you a notification out of the blue to show you a picture from this very date X numbers of years ago. Suddenly in the middle of your day you are confronted with where you were and what you were doing in yesteryear however profound or mundane. How does it make you feel? And how do you feel generally when looking at old pictures?



Read Ezekiel 2: 1-5

A prophet for this generation...

Who are the prophets speaking to the years we are living through now? What are the **timeless** messages God's people need to year and what are the **timely** messages that we need to hear in 2021?

Read Mark 6: 1-6

Time doesn't stand still...

...and neither did Jesus's ministry. When he came to Nazareth Jesus didn't have a hometown advantage, he was in fact undermined by the folk who had known him before, who wanted to put limits on who he could be in their mind.

What's your relationship like with your hometown? Is it where you live now, or do you now live somewhere else? How have you, and it, changed over the years? What is your prayer for your hometown?

Read Philippians 3: 7-16

Whatever the years have brung...

We can learn from our experiences but we are not bound by them. Reflection can be helpful but our God of mercy and love does not want us to be trapped under the weight of the past. Our God has a better prize in mind than melancholy or nostalgia. In God's tender love there is a home for all of us no matter where we have come or what we have been through. What does the prize that Paul talks about here — the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus — mean to you today?

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Part 3: Seconds

Conversation starter

As a group, or individually, start a stopwatch running and look away. Then look back when you think exactly 60 seconds have passed... How close did you get?

What is your relationship like with time? Always too much or never enough? How good are you generally at judging it? Do you tend to lose track or are you someone who generally has a good idea what time it is even when you haven't looked at a clock recently? Do you tend to run late or early?



Read 2 Samuel 6: 12-19

In the moment...

David was entirely in the zone — completely present, second to second, worshipping God. He was in his flow state dancing with all his might.

When do you feel completely in the zone and immersed? A flow state where everything seems to click. It could be on the pitch, up a mountain, on the dance floor, or mortar and pestle in hand in the kitchen. It doesn't have to be 'worship' in a conventional sense — but is there a way in which God is present with you in that activity or that you could invite God to join you in appreciating it?

Read Ephesians 1: 3-14

This very instant...

Right here, right now, in the seconds passing this instance we are connected to the great span of eternity through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit! What do you make of that? How does it make you feel about the rest of your day?

Read Matthew 26: 47-56

At once...

Let's try and get into the mindset of Jesus. With divine knowledge and human vulnerability he experienced the passage of time as we do, second by second, knowing he couldn't just summon angels to rescue him in the blink of an eye. What on earth must that have been like for him?

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Part 4: All History

Conversation starter

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth — divinity burst into history in a moment of extraordinary love that stands outside of time... resonating forever.... and ever... and ever...

Before we carry on — what do you think are some of the other most significant events in history?



Read Colossians 1: 15-20

All things...

What does it mean, do you reckon, that 'all things' hold together through Jesus?

Read Ecclesiastes 3: 9-15

Nothing new under the sun...

These ancient words give us an interesting perspective on time. We tend to think of time in a straightforward line but God is outside of the constraints of time as we know it. The poetic phrase in verse 15: "That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by." gives us a glimpse of an alternative way of looking at history as God might, from above rather than in the midst of it. It also sounds eerily like how contemporary physicists sometimes talk about the uncanny nature of time!

What's it like to have a relationship with God, with someone who is outside of our conception of time?

Read John 1: 1-5, Luke 6: 27-31, John 19: 28-30 and Hebrews 13: 8

Yesterday / today / forever

The Word at the heart of the universe as it was spoken into being, the vagabond teacher turning the world upside down, the beloved friend who gave up his life in the ultimate gesture of love and sacrifice, the person we can speak to now... Jesus has always been, and always will be, there for us.

What do you like most about Jesus?

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Part 5: Time's Gonna Tell

Conversation starter

They say time is a healer and they also say that laughter is the best medicine! Are there times in your life that were stressful and hard as you were going through them but that you can now look back at and laugh, or smile with fondness for who you used to be and what you have come through? How has God been with you through the laughter and the tears?



Read Ephesians 3: 14-21

Boundless...

God's love isn't available for a trial period, there isn't an initial offer window, there isn't an expiry date, there isn't a cancellation fee, there isn't a fair usage limit. It's huge. It's truly, truly huge. We're used to looking for a catch, for the rug that will get pulled from under our feet. But Paul's saying no, this love is bigger than our fear, our doubt, our suspicion.

There's a funny bit in the text where he urges that the reader might comprehend and know what he then says is beyond knowledge! Why then should we strive to know something that's unknowable? (And what's the 'fullness of God' anyway?)

Read Psalm 14 and John 6: 1-15

Fast food vs. slow food...

Eugene Peterson's *The Message* verse 4:

**"Don't they know anything,
all these predators?
Don't they know
they can't get away with this—
Treating people like a fast-food meal
over which they're too busy to pray?"**

Contrasting with the callous 'fast-food' of the predators in Psalm 14, we read in John's gospel about some nourishing 'slow food'. Thanks is thoughtfully given for the food and it is painstakingly shared out until all are full and there are even leftovers.

What can we do to work together towards a society and economy where other people are seen as a blessing able to nourish us, rather than as something expendable to use up and cast aside?

Read Mark 1: 14-15

The very Kingdom of God has drawn near and it is Good News!

How can we share this Good News today?