

CHAPTER TWELVE

Space: Time in Worship

EXERCISE

1. Write down 4 or 5 of the most important tenets of the Christian faith.
2. Are there ways throughout the year that we celebrate these ideas?
3. Are there some we don't celebrate that we should?

Introduction

When God created the world, he made it to progress in rhythms and cycles. He created the course of the sun to give us each day, the course of the moon for each month, and the rhythm of the seasons for each year. He mapped out seven days for us—six for work and one for rest—to give us weeks. As we saw in chapter 10, God gave his people a place to worship that told a story about who he is. Likewise, he ordered their time in a way that told a story of his work in the world. He ordered his people's worship by giving rhythm and order to its services and to its years. And we should acknowledge with our worship that God wants to order our lives by his time.

Discussion

Ordering Our Lives in Time

In the past, and even in many places in the world today, cultures ordered their community life by times: times to plant and to harvest, times to eat and to work, times to sleep and to rise. Activities could only be done during certain windows of time; they couldn't harvest crops until they came to fruition, they could only eat the crops that grew in that season, they went to bed with the sun for lack of light, and they couldn't eat a meal until the cook made and served it. This kind of order is guided by the rhythms and cycles that God built into the world at creation.

In our culture today, however, our community's time is becoming disordered. Instead of regular

meals cooked by a member of our household and eaten together, we can eat anything we want, day or night, because of fast food, prepackaged food, and food shipped in from all over the world. Because of technology, we can watch our favorite movies, television shows, or listen to our favorite music any time of day or night. Even education has become something we can do on our own, virtually and at any time.

ILLUSTRATION

When we read about or visit other countries and their people, we find feasts, festivals, and other monthly or yearly celebrations. Most cultures have a weekly cycle that involves days of work and days of rest. They also have daily cycles of meals, work, and rest; in America many of us eat three meals—morning, noon, and evening—and rest until we sleep, while some other cultures rest in the middle of the day and work and eat the evening meal later.

Most cultures also order time to reflect their particular people's values, priorities, and story. There might be celebrations that remember a significant occasion in that culture's history or revolve around sporting and arts events. In America's twenty-first century, we celebrate the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and President's Day. We have Oscar and Grammy parties and gather to watch and celebrate the World Series, Super Bowl, March Madness, and the World Cup.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does the culture in which we live give us a good cycle of working and resting? What values, priorities, and story does our culture build into its celebrations?

Reordering Our Lives in Time

The disordering of time in our culture has led some Christians to ask whether it is necessary to assemble in a particular time and place for worship. After all, we can experience sermons, music, and even human contact through our computers. But God wants his people to reorder their corporate time in a way that celebrates his work in the world. This means that it is important that we *not give up meeting together* as believers, as an act of submission to God and to each other. (Hebrews 10:25) And we not only give our Sabbaths to God, but also our whole year. Meeting together to worship in a particular time and place and following the church calendar bear witness to the fact that our worship is where we express our love for God and are formed to love him; worship is not just one more thing we try to fit into our schedules.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do we only mark the celebratory times of the church calendar or do we build in time to learn how to wait and mourn?

Lesson

God uses Christian worship to reorder our time around his work in the world. (Jeremiah 5:20-25)

ILLUSTRATION

Just as in Exodus God instructed his people to reorder their space as a community, so, in Leviticus, he instructed his people to reorder their time as a community. God gave them instructions for sacrifices and offerings as well as feasts, fasts, and festivals. He ordered their weeks, months, and years, even to seven- and then 49-year cycles. This order told the story of God's work to his people, to their children, and to the neighboring nations.

Since the coming of Christ and the kingdom of God, the Church has reordered her time to tell the story of this new work in our world. Our calendar includes Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Sunday Sabbath among other markers. Like in the Old Testament, there are times to feast and celebrate as well as times to fast and mourn.

Festivals like Christmas and Easter teach us how to feast and celebrate. These are rich and often very expressive times in our worship life. But it is also important to observe seasons like Advent and Lent that prepare us for these celebrations. Advent is a time of longing where we learn to hope and anticipate Christ's coming. Lent is a time for us to mourn and prepare to rejoice in Christ's resurrection. Just as it is important in our liturgy and music to be formed to express *all* of our life with God, so it is important that we structure our time to form us to express the whole of the Christian life.

Handout: Space: Time in Worship

Exercise

1. Write down 4 or 5 of the most important tenets of the Christian faith.
2. Are there ways throughout the year that we celebrate these things?
3. Are there things we don't celebrate that we should?

Discussion Question

1. Does the culture that we live in give us a good cycle of working and resting? What values, priorities, and story does our culture build into its celebrations?
2. Do we only mark the celebratory times of the church calendar or do we build in time to learn how to wait and mourn?

Lesson

God uses Christian worship to reorder our time around his work in the world. (Jeremiah 5:20-25)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

O Lord our God,
You have given us a day of rest, the seal of the Sabbath that is to come. Sprinkle all our Sabbaths with the cleansing blood of Jesus. Give us in rich abundance the blessings the Sabbath was designed to impart. Flood our minds with peace beyond understanding – make our meditations sweet – our acts of worship joyful – our food Your precious Word – and make our hearts more knit to Jesus, we pray. Amen.