

# Directions for Redeeming or Well Improving of Time

*Richard Baxter*

Being Man's Opportunity For All Those Works  
For Which He Liveth,  
and  
Which His Creator Doth Expect From Him,  
and  
On Which His Endless Life Dependeth,  
The Redeeming or Well Improving Of It  
Must Needs Be  
Of Most High Importance To Him;

And therefore, it is well made by holy Paul

The Great Mark To Distinguish The Wise From Fools;

Eph. 5:15- 6.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, Not as fools, But as wise, Redeeming the time;"

Also Col. 4:5.

"Walk in Wisdom, Toward Them That Are Without, Redeeming The Time."

I shall therefore give you special directions for it, when I have first opened the nature of the duty to you, and told you what is meant by time, and what by redeeming it.

Time, in its most common acceptance: Is taken generally for

**All that space of this present life  
Which is our opportunity  
For all the works of life,  
And the measure of them.**

Time is often taken more strictly, for some special opportunity which is fitted to a special work, which we call the season or the fittest time: in both these senses time must be redeemed.

## **What Are The Special Seasons of Duty?**

As every work hath its season which must be taken, Eccles. 3:1; So have the greatest works assigned us for God and our souls, some special seasons besides our common time.

1. Some times God hath fitted by nature for his service. So the time of youth and health, and

strength is specially fitted for holy works.

2. Some time is made specially fit by God's institution; as the Lord's day above all other days.
3. Some time is made fit by governors' appointment: as the hour of public meeting for God's worship; and lecture days; and the hour for family worship, which every master of a family may appoint to his own household.
4. Some time is made fit by the temper of men's bodies: the morning hours are the best to most, and to some rather the evening; and to all, the time when the body is freest from pain and disabling weaknesses.
5. Some time is made fit by the course of our necessary, natural, or civil business; as the day is fitter than the sleeping time of the night, and as that hour is the fittest wherein our other employments will least disturb us.
6. Some time is made fit by a special shower of mercy, public or private; as when we dwell in godly families, among the most exemplary, helpful company, under the most lively, excellent means, the faithfulest pastors, the profitablest teachers, the best masters or parents, and with faithful friends.
7. Some time is made fit by particular acts of Providence: as a funeral sermon at the death of any near us; as the presence of some able minister or private christian, whose company we cannot ordinarily have; or a special leisure, as the eunuch had to read the Scripture in his chariot, Acts 8.
8. And some time is made specially fit, by the special workings of God's Spirit upon the heart; when He more than ordinarily illuminateth, teacheth, quickeneth, softeneth, humbleth, comforteth, exciteth, or confirmeth. As time in general, so specially these seasons, must be particularly improved for their several works: we must take the wind and tide while we may have it, and be sure to strike while the iron is hot.
9. And some time is made fit by others' necessities, and the call of God: as it is the time to relieve the poor when they ask, or when they are most in want; or to help our neighbor, when it will do him most good; to visit the sick, the imprisoned, and afflicted, in the needful season, Matt. 24. Thus are the godly like trees planted by the river side, which bring forth fruit in their season, Psalm 1:3. So to speak in season to the ignorant and ungodly for their conversion, or to the sorrowful to their consolation, Isa. 1:4.
10. Our own necessity also maketh our seasons: so the time of age and sickness is made by necessity the season of our special repentance and preparation for death and judgment.
11. The present time is commonly made our season, through the uncertainty of a fitter, or of any more. Prov. 3:27, 28, "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee." Eccles. 11:2, "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Prov. 27:1, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Gal. 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith." These are our special seasons.

### **What Redeeming Time Supposeth.**

To redeem the time supposeth.

1. That we know what we have to do with time, and on what we ought to lay it out; and of

how great worth the things are for which we must redeem it.

2. That we highly value time in order to this necessary work.
3. That we are sensible of the greatness of our win and loss, in our neglect or wilful losing so much as we have done already.
4. That we know the particular season of each duty.
5. And that we set less by all that which we must part with in our redeeming time, than we do by time itself, and its due ends: or else we will not make the bargain.

### **What It Containeth.**

And as these five things are pre-supposed, so these following are contained in our redeeming time.

1. To redeem time is to see that we cast none of it away in vain; but use every minute of it as a most precious thing, and spend it wholly in the way of duty.
2. That we be not only doing good, but doing the best and greatest good which we are able and have a call to do.
3. That we do not only the best things, but do them in the best manner and in the greatest measure, and do as much good as possibly we can.
4. That we watch for special opportunities.
5. That we presently take them when they fall, and improve them when we take them.
6. That we part with all that is to be parted with, to save our time.
7. And that we forecast the preventing of impediments, and the removal of our clogs, and the obtaining of all the helps to expedition and success in duty.

### **This is the true redeeming of our time.**

The ends and uses which time must be redeemed for are these:

1. In general, and ultimately, it must be all for God. Thought not all employed directly upon God, in meditating of Him, or praying to Him; yet all must be laid out for Him, immediately or mediately: that is, either in serving Him, or in preparing for His service; in mowing, or in whetting; in traveling, or in baiting to fit us for travel. And so our time of sleep, and feeding, and needful recreation is laid out for God.
2. Time must be redeemed, especially for works of public benefit; for the church and state; for the souls of many; especially by magistrates and ministers, who have special charge and opportunity; who "must spend and be spent" for the people's sakes, though rewarded with ingratitude and contempt, 2 Cor 12:14,15.
3. For your own souls, and your everlasting life; for speedy conversion without delay, if you be yet unconverted; for the killing of every soul-endangering sin without delay; for the exercise and increase of young and unconfirmed grace, and the growth of knowledge; for the making sure our calling and election; and for the storing up provisions of faith, and hope, and love, and comfort against the hour of suffering and of death.
4. We must redeem time for the souls of every particular person that we have opportunity to do good to; especially for children and servants, and others whom God hath committed to our trust.

5. For the welfare of our own bodies, that they may be serviceable to our souls.
6. And lastly, for the bodily welfare of others.

And this is the order in which those works lie, for which and in which our time must be redeemed.

### **The price that time must be redeemed with, is,**

1. Above all, by our utmost diligence: that we be still doing, and put forth all our strength, and run as for our lives; and whatever our hand shall find to do, that we do it without might, remembering that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither we go, Ecc. 9:10. Our sluggish ease is an easy price to be parted with for precious time. To redeem it, is not to call back time past; nor to stop time in its hasty passage; nor to procure a long life on earth: but to save it, as it passeth, from being devoured and lost, by sluggishness and sin.

2. Time must be redeemed from the hands, and by the loss of sinful pleasures, sports and revellings, and all that is of itself or by accident unlawful; from wantonness, and licentiousness, and vanity. Both these are set together, Romans 13:11-14, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

3. Time must be redeemed from things indifferent and lawful at another time, when things necessary do require it. He that should save men's lives, or quench a fire in his house, or provide for his family, or do his master's work, will not be excused if he neglect it, by saying, that he was about an indifferent or a lawful business. Natural rest and sleep must be parted with for time, when necessary things require it. Paul preached till midnight being to depart on the morrow, Acts 20:7. The lamenting church calling out for prayer saith, "Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord," Lam. 2:19. Cleanthes' lamp must be used by such whose sun-light must be otherwise employed.

4. Time must be redeemed from worldly business and commodity, when matters of greater weight and commodity do require it. Trades, and plough, and profit must stand by, when God calls us (by necessity or otherwise) to greater things. Martha should not so much as trouble herself in providing meat for Christ and His followers to eat, when Christ is offering her food for her soul, and she should with Mary have been hearing at His feet, Luke 10:42. Worldlings are thus called by Him, Isa. 55:1-3, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

5. Time must be redeemed from smaller duties, which in their season must be done, as being no duties, when they hinder greater duty which should then take place. It is a duty in its time and place to show respect to neighbours and superiors, and to those about us, and to look to our family affairs; but not when we should be at prayer, to God, or when a minister should be preaching, or at his necessary studies. Private prayer and meditation, and visiting the sick, are duties; but not when we should be at church, or about any greater duty which they hinder.

### **The Directions contemplative for redeeming Time**

Still keep upon thy heart, by faith and consideration, the lively sense of the greatness and absolute necessity of that work, which must command thy time; remembering who setteth thee on work, and on what work He sets thee, and on what terms, and what will be the end. It is God that calleth thee to labour; and wilt thou stand still or be doing other things, when God expecteth duty from thee? Moses must go to Pharaoh when God bids him go; Jonah must go to Nineveh when God bids him go; yea, Abraham must go to sacrifice his son when God bids him go. And may you go about your fleshy pleasure, when God commandeth you to His service? He hath appointed you a work that is worth your time and all your labour; to know Him and serve Him and obey Him and to seek everlasting life! How diligently should so excellent a work be done! And so blessed and glorious a Master be served! Especially considering the unutterable importance of our diligence! We are in the race appointed us by our Maker, and are to run for an immortal crown. It is heaven that must be now won or lost, and have we time to spare in such a race? We are fighting against the enemies of our salvation; the question is now to be resolved, whether the flesh, the world, and the devil, or we, shall win the day, and have the victory. And heaven or hell must be the issue at our warfare: and have we time to spare in the midst of such a fight? When our very loss of time is no small part of the enemy's conquest? Our most wise, omnipotent Creator hath been pleased to make this present life to be the trying preparation here and can we play and loiter away our time, that have such a work as this to do? O miserable, senseless souls! Do you believe indeed the life everlasting, and that all your lives are given you now, to resolve the question whether you must be in heaven or hell for ever? Do you believe this? Again I ask you, do you believe this? I beseech you; ask your conscience over and over, whether you do indeed believe it? Can you believe it, and yet have time to spare? What! Find time to play away, and game away, and idle and prate away, and yet believe that this very time is given you to prepare for life eternal? And that salvation or damnation lieth on the race which now, even now you have to run? Is not such a man a monster of stupidity? If you were asleep, or mad, it were the more excusable to be so senseless: but to do thus awake, and in your wits!

Oh where are the brains of those men, and of what metal are their hardened hearts made, that can idle and play away that time, that little time, that only time, which is given them for the everlasting saving of their souls! Verily, sirs, if sin had not turned the ungodly part of the world into a bedlam, where it is no wonder to see a man out of his wits, people would run out with wonder into the streets to see such a monster as this, as they do to see mad-men in the country where they are rare; and they would call to one another, Come and see a man, that can trifle and sport away his time, as he is going to eternity, and is ready to enter into another world! Come and see a man that hath but a few days to win or lose his soul, for ever in, and is playing it away at cards or dice, or wasting it in doing nothing! Come and see a man that hath

hours to spare, and cast away upon trifles, with heaven and hell before his eyes. For thy soul's sake, consider and tell thyself, if thy estate in the world did lie upon the spending of this day or week, or if thy life lay on it, so that thou must live or die, or be poor or rich, sick or well, as thou spendest it, wouldst thou then waste it in dressings, or compliment, or play? And wouldst thou find any to spare upon impertinent triflings? Or rather wouldst thou not be up betimes, and about thy business, and turn by thy games, and thy diverting company and disappoint thy idle visitors, and let them find that thou art not to be spoken with, nor at leisure to do nothing, but wilt rather seem uncivil and morose, than be undone! And wouldst thou do thus for a transitory prosperity or life, and doth not life eternal require much more? Will thy weighty business in the world, resolve thee, to put by thy friends, thy play-fellows and sports, and to shake off thy idleness? And should not the business of thy salvation do it? I would desire no more to confute the distracted time-wasters, when they are disputing for their idle-sports and vanities, and asking what harm is in cards, and dice, and stage-plays, or tedious feasts or complimenting, adorning idleness, than if I could help them to one sight of heaven, and hell, and make them well know what greater business they have to do, which is staying for them while they sleep or play.

If I were just now in disputing the case with an idle lady, or a sensual belly-slave or gamester, and he were asking me scornfully, what hurt is in all this? if one did but knock at his door and tell him, the king is at the door and calls for you, it would make him to cast away his game, and his dispute: or if the house were on fire, or a child fallen into the fire or water, or thieves breaking in upon them, it would make the ladies cast by the other lace or riband? Or if there were but a good bargain or a lordship to be got, they could be up and going, though sports and game and gaudery were cast off: and yet the foresight of heaven is as nothing to an unbeliever, or an inconsiderate, senseless wretch; and as it is nothing to them when it should move them, it shall be nothing to them when they would enjoy it. Say not, recreation must be used in its season: I know that necessary whetting is no letting: but God and thy own conscience shall tell thee shortly, whether thy recreation, feasting, long dressings, and idleness, were a necessary whetting or refreshment of thy body, to fit it for that work which thou wast born and livest for; or whether they were the pastimes of a voluptuous, fleshy brute, that lived in these pleasures for the love of pleasure. Verily, if I looked but on this one unreasonable sin of time-wasting, it would help me to understand the meaning of Luke 15:17, that the prodigal is said to come to himself; and that conversion is the bringing of a man to his wits.

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