

# OpenTheo

## Restoring the Dignity of Time (with Amber Bowen)

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Today, my friend Amber Bowen, who is undertaking doctoral studies on the New Phenomenology, joins me for a discussion of the subject of time.

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### Transcript

Hello, and welcome to another episode. Today, I am joined by my friend Amber Bowen, who is doing a PhD at the University of Aberdeen. Her supervisors are Craig Bartholomew and Jay Aaron Simmons, and she's doing work on Kierkegaard and the new phenomenology.

So first of all, Amber, can you tell us what on earth is the new phenomenology? Yeah, I get that question a lot. When I first started studying or hearing about new phenomenology, my first question was, I don't, I'm not sure I know what the old phenomenology was. But new phenomenology is mostly represented by thinkers in France, philosophers coming out of France, and it really engages this question of what do theology and philosophy or theology and phenomenology have to do with one another? And so what are ways that the methods of phenomenology can be helpful for theological questions? And what ways are there maybe resources from theology that can be brought into the phenomenological inquiry? So for people who may not be certain about the meaning of the term, what is phenomenology? What sort of questions is it trying to

answer? Yeah, so phenomenology, instead of looking at reality from the perspective of maybe speculative categories or abstract constructs that overlay reality that we use maybe to interpret reality, phenomenology attends instead to the way that reality presents itself or the way that it gives itself and it's looking for patterns, connections, and ways of being that we see out in the world.

I call it just shorthand. It's like an under-the-sun perspective. And so it's setting aside a lot of the interpretive categories that we have in just looking strictly at the way things appear.

So who would be some of the famous names within the tradition that the conversation partners that you'll be dealing with in thinking about some of the topics that we're discussing today and that you're thinking about more generally? Well, there's quite a few of them. Phenomenology is a long tradition or some people say a family lineage. I like to think of it as a tradition.

There's a few crazy uncles and some weird cousins that are part of it, too. Edmund Husserl is known as the father of phenomenology or the phenomenological method and you have people like Husserl, after Husserl, you have people like Heidegger that follow. And then moving into the new phenomenologists, you have most famously Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, you have Jean-Yves Lacoste, and that's actually one person who I lean on a bit in this conversation about time.

Emanuel Falk is another one. And part of my work is actually to show that Kierkegaard is more of a kind of phenomenologist than he is an existentialist. So I look to him as sort of a father figure for the tradition.

So how would you distinguish between existentialism and phenomenology? That's a great question. They're not necessarily mutually exclusive. Existentialism is attending to the way that the self lives in the world, different ways of being, what is subjective reality like, what does it mean to be part of this human existence? And in many ways, those are all questions that phenomenology includes, but phenomenology is a much more rigorous method that gets underneath that and starts asking deeper questions about the underlying structures of reality that would give rise to such experiences.

So today we're going to discuss the subject of time, which Christians have been discussing for a long time. If you go back to Augustine, he gets into the question of what time is, and this is something that has some significance for the way that we think about our Christian faith, how we live in the world, how we understand Christian practices, how we tell our stories, all these sorts of aspects of Christian experience and thought. How can you explain the phenomenological approach to time as it might differ from some of the other approaches that are out there? Maybe the approach offered by physics or something like that? Right.

I think that this is something that's incredibly fascinating and has a lot of promising, it has a lot of prospects for some very new ways of thinking about time. So typically the conversation on time is divided into objective time and subjective time. Physicists typically look at things like objective time or analytic philosophy looks a lot at objective time.

Then you have people in more of the existential vein or the psychological vein who are going to look at subjective time. And one thing about my research is, I see this as a pattern in my own life, whenever I see a gap like that, that doesn't sit well with me. And my first thought is, how can we close the gap? How can we bring these two things together and reintegrate them? And so in what ways should those two questions not be separate lines of inquiry, but could they be brought together a little bit more? And I think that phenomenology is the way to do that as a method.

Because it's not going to divorce the subjective and the objective together. It's going to use the subjective as a way of getting at the objective. So if you're taking a scientific approach to time, how would a scientist and the questions that they raise feed into a phenomenological approach to time? Yeah, well you're gonna ask questions.

I would say just take for example the question about the self's continuity through time. That would be a way that a philosopher would take more of the resources from the scientific method to get at the nature of time in the human relationship to time. Typically those kinds of questions are what are ways that the self can persist, that's the term, through time? How can there be a cohesive identity or a diachronic continuity, if you will, as the self moves through time? And so in order to do that, we typically locate the self's identity in an underlying X. You know, everybody has a different theory of what that might be.

An underlying something that is unaffected by time. And so then that way it can persist through it without being disintegrated by time. An interesting question though that I think a phenomenologist would ask is are we importing an assumption that time is inherently fragmenting or disintegrating of the self? Are we just operating on the basis of that? Where did we pick that up? Do we want to keep that in our bag? Or do you want to get rid of it? And are there ways that maybe we can reconceptualize time as it appears to us in our lived human experience in ways that are more integrated? So when we think about time from a human perspective, there are ways in which we can experience unity through the transitions in time.

We think about a piece of music. The unity of a piece of music doesn't necessarily involve just this unrelenting sameness, this underlying reality that isn't changing. It can be precisely in the movements that connect things through time that we find the unity.

And in the same way, I imagine our own stories. That's right. And the way that actions and events arise in time and have different crescendos and different points, and that

doesn't mean that it's divorced from even the objective nature of the self, right? Or objective reality around it.

It's the very thing that they're like the threads that form the rope of continuity. And so attending to that and with phenomenology, it allows us to see it in a different way as opposed to just a strictly linear view of time where we kind of just move through the passage of time. Which is not how our life experience works and how we perceive time from a human standpoint.

So we're approaching these questions not just as people who have philosophical interest, but as Christians. And Christians should have philosophical interest, but there's something deeper in our study of time that we're looking for. And what were some of the Christian impulses and concerns that led you to think in these sorts of areas? It's a really great question.

I was thinking about today, when was it that I really gained a passion for this conversation? And I think that in the academic conversations and in philosophical conversations, I did gain a passion for it. But I think it was also life experiences and even theological questions that gave me this drive to investigate this a little bit more. I remember early on in my PhD, one of my supervisors, Craig Bartholomew, we were having a meeting and I must have presented to him like a research plan or something like that.

And knowing me, it was probably overly ambitious. And I remember he said to me, he said, my hope for you as you go through this program is that you acquire a different disposition toward time from the one that you are probably coming from and that you're bred in and that's in the air that you're breathing as a North American and also as an evangelical. He said there's a kind of activism in the world that you come from.

He actually said, I think it's a demon that must be exercised regularly. But he said, there is something about time that it does what nothing else can do. You can read three times as many books, you can get your hand on every bit, a piece of knowledge and you should, you must do rigorous research.

But it cannot substitute, it cannot do for your work what time can do for your work. So I want you to get used to this idea of leisure study and of letting ideas sit and of letting yourself grow as a person and not just producing things. And that really struck me because that's not my intuition.

But then I started thinking about other lived experiences like I lived in Milan, Italy for about four and a half years and I love Italian cooking. And Italian cooks will tell you that time is an ingredient like none other. Bread, their food is remarkably simple.

It's flour and butter and yeast and time, you know, it's milk and enzymes and time. Like

it's time is this ingredient that you can't substitute for. American cooking, we like to add 15,000 ingredients to our food.

And I think it's as a way to add things to substitute for time. And it's just not the same. Yep.

Some of those lived experiences, spiritually speaking, I started noticing as I was thinking about myself and my work and who I am in Christ and I started noticing themes in scripture about the height of fruitfulness being attributed not to youth, but to old age. And I started noticing things like God operates in the fullness of time and he raises people up for such a time as this and it God's patient and faithfulness is measured not by talent or charisma or genius, but it's measured by time. There's something about like the goodness of time that we see in scripture.

And so those are a lot of the questions that drove me my interest in this. So many of the things you're saying it seems that the word time is serving a number of purposes. It's not just I mean, when people think about time they're thinking about minutes on a clock, for instance, often.

But when you're talking about the fullness of time, it's a certain quality of time, perhaps, or if you're talking about taking time, it's about a period of stepping back, perhaps. And there are many other ways that we're talking about time that maybe need a bit of unpacking first. What are some of the different ways in which we experience time? What are some of the ways we can bring concepts, maybe to take a bit more purchase upon the different ways in which we experience or the different qualities that time can have? So just throwing out some of the ideas, what are some of the concepts or the notions that you found helpful in thinking about this? Well, I would say one of the things that I had to set aside is the idea of time as a commodity or a limited resource or a ticking clock.

Yep. I thought all of those things were very unhelpful. But all of those things were concepts that I was bringing to time in ways that I was living time through those concepts.

So, I mean, the way that people run their lives and their schedules, everything in our culture, including the beauty industry, technology, you know, technology is to promise us that we shouldn't have to wait for anything ever. It's instant. It's there.

It shows up. The beauty industry will help you reverse the effects of time, or at least combat it. It's like the anti-venom of time, which assumes that time is this poison, you know, that destroys.

When we set our schedules, it's like the stopwatch that just goes as soon as you wake up in the morning. And then we measure productivity in terms of how much can you

achieve per unit of time. And someone who's considered a beast is someone who can outwit time or who can achieve so much in a small amount of time.

And so it's this race against time where we feel like time is not on our side. Time is money. Yep.

So I think these are ways that we live and experience time that don't allow us to maybe ask the question of, are there ways that time is actually constitutive of us? Are there things that time is doing? It's not just about us doing things in time, but things that time is doing to us that are good and not just like our faces sagging. And when you talk about a phenomenological approach, in many ways, it seems to me what phenomenologists are often trying to do is to train us to be attentive, to notice things. And even the ways that we speak about time, there are ways that we speak about time that don't easily fit with the notions that we have that can be very constrained when we're thinking about time.

When we talk about taking time, it's more than just putting certain minutes of the day aside. Or when we think about the concept of being a contemporary of someone, what does it mean to be in the same time as someone else? Those sorts of notions, along with a myriad of others, suggest that time is richer and we have an instinct for that. But maybe we've not paid enough attention to it to try and unpack what might be within that box of our instinct that is not yet articulated within our understanding.

I think that's absolutely right. You see it peeking through at different points. We do have an appreciation for foods that are aged in time and we do get a glimpse of the maturing effect that time has.

We do talk about things like a seasoned scholar, for example, that would also be an example of a maturing effect. We talk about how time heals a broken heart. Yep.

So all these things have positive notions of time. But I don't know that we think about how those positive notions might critique our other notions of time. And for this new phenomenologist who I love, I think it's very helpful here, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and his notion of liturgy.

And when he talks about liturgy, he's not talking strictly about just practices that are done. He's talking about the encounter with the absolute writ large. But if you take an example of liturgy, where it is, he calls it a non-place and a non-time.

And it's funny, it's like, okay, we didn't need more jargon from continental philosophers. But it's really simple, the idea. Imagine if you are, you know, on the streets, in the streets of Italy and you walk into a beautiful cathedral.

And the experience of that, it's like the loud noises and the hustle and bustle that that's going on outside. It's like you escape it momentarily and you enter into this very

different space. And when you're in this space, you, like, time just feels different.

It's not like you feel the tick of a clock. You don't feel the tick of your watch quite as much. You just enter a bit into this other realm, but it's not an other realm.

It's still a material place. It's still, you know, wood and rock and things that we experience materially, but it's a different way of experiencing place and also a different way of experiencing time and you're connected to the Saints of old. You're looking at the movement of the church throughout history and all these different things.

So it moves you into this different dimension that he just called non-time. But the great thing about that experience is it's like it plucks you out of the tyranny of the urgent you live in. It makes you have a different mode of being within time that serves to critique the ultimacy of the tyranny of the moment or the tyranny of the urgent that we typically swim in.

I think that's one of the things that has always made me curious and excited about biblical typology because typology is above everything else. It's an exploration of the lineaments of time, the way that certain times and persons through time and events and objects are connected to each other. So we can live out certain patterns in time, something like the Passover pattern that connects original events of the Exodus.

It's recapitulated every single year when they celebrate the Passover and then in the new covenant, of course, it's connected with Christ's death and resurrection. And as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we're suspended in time. We're suspended between the event of the past, we are memorializing his death, we're recapitulating the events of the Last Supper, the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine.

But we're also anticipating the age to come, the wedding feast, the final great supper of the Lamb. And in that sense, we're suspended between these two times and I try and think of suitable illustrations for it. It's not easy, but one of the things I think of is almost like this great rock that's dropped in the middle of a lake.

And the ripples going towards the shore and every single week, it's as if those ripples hit us anew. And it's like the beating of the heart of the church, but it's also this movement where we're feeling the effect of that past event that is nearer to us as its pattern is being played out again. But then it's also moving us towards something in the future.

There's an anticipation of something still to come. And so that experience of time can't do justice to that with the idea of minutes on the hand of the clock. That's not how it's working here.

There's a quality to time there that differs from the time that we've just moved from as you're driving towards church, for instance, and you're stuck in traffic. That's a very different sort of time from the time that you have when you're actually celebrating in the

liturgy of the church and you have a sense of being caught up in a time that you're sharing with other events in history. I think the church calendar has been another way in which Christians have tried to recognize the way that our time can be mapped on to a greater time and become in some way a participant in a sort of a dance of time through the ages that our time is made part of those same rhythms.

It takes on something of this quality just by having that fundamental template within it. Yeah, and that's why I love talking about the musicality of time. Because it has those refrains, it has those repeats, and it has those moments of suspension and it thinks about time, not primarily in atomistic ways.

You know, whereas the ticking of the clock, it's very like each moment is the same in sequence, one after another, largely disconnected from one another, just individual slices, right, that are kind of put together or bundled together. Whereas the musicality of time and the experience of time in that way, there's an affective dimension to it. There's a being caught up in it.

There's a flavor to time. There's a feel of time. It's a much richer experience than simply the passing of the hours.

I wonder whether part of the problem here is that when we think about time, we try and translate time into space. So we think about duration and we think about lots of different minutes as if there were different slots lined up in front of us and we're filling them with different things. We're not filling them.

It's maybe your day planner or something like that. That may be the way that you think about time. But time is very different from that.

It has that musical quality to it, as you mentioned. And there is, for instance, when you're listening to a piece of music, a silence is not an absence. A silence can be incredibly full.

It can be charged with the things that have just gone and the anticipation of what's to come. And a silence that is disconnected from anything else is a very strange thing in a piece of music. It breaks things.

And whereas when you're listening to a piece of music, there is the realization that you're part of something that extends beyond the immediate moment in time. It's not just the now. There's a connection between things that have gone before and things that are coming afterwards.

And it's part of a unit of time. It's not just a minute. It's not just the smallest vibration that we could imagine occurring within a fraction of time that we could use as a means of measuring it.



Atomic clock or something like that. There is something about that time that has a quality to it. I think within human life, more generally, we feel that we have a sense of some people who are inhabiting the same age.

And then there is a break between ages. Some event happens and things are no longer inhabiting the same time. And there, I think we also see that within our own lives.

There can be these transitions and one of the helpful ways I've thought about is the movement from these times where we're sowing things a lot to times of reaping, where we're experiencing the consequences of the things that we chose earlier on in life. And that can often be a crisis time for people, but it's also a time that offers new possibilities that if you have really sown well, you can reap this great harvest and there's the consequences of your actions in the past. And then we can change through time.

Time is something that we can take hold of and can become part of us in a way that gives us new potential. You talk about being a seasoned person in certain respects. Or people who are able to, as it were, move with time, almost like a surfer on a wave.

There's something about their inhabiting of that time. It's not just being within this tyranny of a machine that's just moving on independent of human existence and life. But there are ways in which we can gather together time and the whole concept of redeeming the time in scripture, I think, is not just trying to fill your day planner.

There's a lot more to it than that. Yeah, I've seen so many people think about that scripture as those scriptures setting this stopwatch over us and saying, go, you know. When in reality, I think what it's expressing is this idea of time as gift, as opposed to time as your allotted ration.

So what are you going to do with it? And are you going to fill it up as much as you possibly can? But when you think about it that way, it can be very fear driven. It can be very production oriented, even performance oriented, right? And it's something that is automatically pitted against you that you have to outwit. But if you think about time as a gift and you think about it as something that God is working through, not asking you to work against, that it gives you a different disposition to it altogether.

And then I love the idea of the seasoned scholar, the seasoned baker, the seasoned whatever it might be, because you do look and you see the product of time in that person. You see the time come together and you see what it has produced and the fruitful effects that it has had. And that it's very different because you can tell a seasoned musician, baker, scholar, whatever it might be, that person is very different from maybe a young person who has a lot of talent, maybe a prodigy, right? And that talent's a wonderful gift and a great thing, but there's still something that the seasoned person has that the young, talented person doesn't have.

I'll be interested to hear your thoughts on the concept of Sabbath. It seems to be one that is very much at the heart of certainly the Old Testament, that concept of Sabbath comes up again and again as a way of thinking about and filling time. And in the New Testament as well, I think there are ways that it comes out.

How can the concept of Sabbath help us to think about time differently? Oh, I think it's like Lacoste talks about that liturgical break with our normal everyday rhythms that critique our old rhythms where they need to be critiqued. You know, it's a way of saying, snap out of it. This isn't ultimacy, right? There's another way of living time.

And maybe it doesn't need to critique our rhythms necessarily, but it needs to allow us to just experience time in a different way that fills us differently. In the same way that you were talking about seasons of sowing and seasons of reaping, I've thought a lot about what does this mean for those seasons where it seems like God is not moving, right? Those times of waiting. How do I process the way that I'm supposed to be and how I understand myself and how I understand my actions in the world and what it is that I'm doing during these times of extended waiting? Is anything that I'm doing right now productive or is this just a big wash? Like is this just a big chunk of time that we're just going to move on from? And thinking about it as you were saying musically and these moments of silence that are not disconnected from what has come before it, but they're also in anticipation of something that is coming afterwards and seeing myself and understanding those times of waiting and stillness and nothingness and seeming unanswered prayers, things like that, as being nonetheless integrated in the life that God is walking through, right? Not fragmented from it, not a sign of breakage, but actually part of the music of my life.

I mean when we think about the original creation week, the idea that the seventh day is part of that week, it's a strange thing that God ends his work and then there's this extra day that feels maybe like this loose part that's fraying at the end that maybe needs to be cut off. It's not part of the fabric, but it is part of the fabric. It's part of the rhythm and God establishes this rhythm whether it's evening morning, there's that pattern each day that's playing out this constant rhythm.

And in that there's a very natural connection between the human being and the world. The world has this evening morning pattern and we have this sleep waking pattern. And there is something about our temporality just in terms of the reality of sleep that we maybe don't give enough attention to.

Or we think about it in terms of refueling. Yes. We're good about that.

If you don't sleep, then it's like not putting gas in your car and your car won't go the next day. So that's why you should sleep or that's why you should take the Sabbath because every six days you need a day of rest if you want to be productive for your week. And it's a way that we've imported a very technological way of understanding human existence

that I think Sabbath is supposed to not necessarily just be reduced to refueling us biologically or even mentally.

But it should be a different mode of being that we practice and it should set a different rhythm for us and help us to see time differently than what we might be thrown into. So the danger is always in that sort of case that our rest occurs under the sign of work. It's just a way in which we're ordered to work differently for a period of time rather than actually something that's truly stepping back and taking time that's set apart.

I like the idea of the Sabbath as the many different ways that we can think about time as related to it. It's a constant rhythm within our lives, this one day in seven. It's the way in which we're stepping back and seeing the way that our time is connected to that great Sabbath of creation or the Sabbath of Christ and resurrection from the dead or the way in which it's anticipating the great day of the Lord.

We gather together on what many of us will call the Lord's day in anticipation of the great Lord's day, the day of the Lord at the end. And that quality of time is something on the one hand this constant rhythm on the other hand something that connects us with the great peaks of time. These events in the past and in the future the landmarks in terms of which all time is understood.

And as it were you're stepping out of the valley of the week onto this peak and you're able to see your own time in a new way. And I've found that really makes a difference partly because the practice of memory and anticipation is something that can be so neglected if we don't have those times of stepping back. Well, and part of that I guess maybe to bring from the new phenomenologist a little bit more, there's the difference though the I'm going to run my schedule way of approaching time.

That's putting me in the driver's seat of time. I'm controlling time and I'm looking at time from the perspective of my own life and I might even schedule time for rest for myself. These are the hours that I have to take a nap or these are the hours that I have for leisure.

But I'm confining that to these hours. And so in that space that relationship of time I stand over and against the time and I manage the time, right? The thing about this Sabbath is it's like it takes that out of our hands and it allows time to manage us. It reverses that and so we have to listen to time and we have to be caught up into time and that's where that memory and that anticipation comes in because it's bringing us up into something.

It's reversing the position of our relationship to time. One aspect of it that maybe we don't think enough about simply because often we talk about time, we're thinking about our personal experience of it. The Sabbath is a shared experience of time and I've again found music helpful here.

When we have music, music can be one of the ways that we coordinate our own bodies. It's also a way in which you can coordinate many bodies together in a dance. There is the ordering of many bodies according to a single piece of music.

So there's a template for movement that is offered to a great many people together and they can be brought together within that. And there's a musicality to our celebration of the Sabbath that brings people together in a single community that would not occur if we were all operating on different times completely and we each had our own sort of musicality that we're practicing or more likely the lack of musicality of just this constant movement of the metronomic movement of time without any sort of rhythm or variation or this the sense of time as this interrelated musical flow. Yeah, or improvisation or flexibility, none of that.

But if you think about our daily lives, I was thinking about this as you were talking that that leads to so much conflict and frustration in our everyday lives because somebody made you wait or your schedules didn't line up or there was a scheduling conflict or something like that where we experience that all the time where it's my schedule is moving in one direction, your schedule is on a completely different set of rails moving in its direction and they might intersect, they might not. And that's very different from this collaborative concept of dance or musicality where there is an intersubjectivity and it's an interpersonal experience and a shared experience as opposed to well, what does your schedule look like versus what does my schedule look like? And I think if you have the experience of a shared house or shared community, that's really tight-knit. Each city can have its own liturgies, each family has its own liturgies, the meal times, the times when you're doing certain chores, when you're doing the dishes together, whatever it is.

There is a sense of a shared music that you enter into and when that is lost, there is something about ourselves that's lost. We no longer function as a community where we're bound together. We start to have the fragmentation of our lives as well because there's something about our continuity in time that requires these sorts of liturgies and patterns unless we feel that there is a connection through time between me now and me as a 10 year old or me as a 20 year old, there is something lacking there.

I don't have purchase upon my past self. It's just something that's disappeared and there's no way in which myself is related to my 60 year old self or whatever. Yeah, it's like this distant, like who was that person that existed way back then without that sense of continuity? But also that sense of change too, right? It's not like I am just, I am simply this numerically identical person that I was when I was six years old and I've managed to persist through time retaining the coherence of my identity, right? I in one sense am the same person that I was back then, but in another sense, I'm not the same person that I was back then and it's because of the work that has been done in me through events and actions and gifts and all these things that have come about through time.

And I think that even when you think about interpersonally and you were talking about the household, when we live on our own by our own schedules and our own personal isolated kind of solipsistic senses of time and thinking about not just the conflict that that creates, but also it pits us against one another in terms of competition, right? Like how far can I get during this period of time versus how far can you get during this period of time as opposed to like you were saying that the dance-like feel of the household or the community where we are experiencing these things together and we are moving with one another, not moving against one another. Thinking about the way in which we can think about virtues that help us to persist and endure in time. One of the ones that comes to mind is just promise making and keeping.

The fact that we make vows and commit ourselves to future action and make promises to commit ourselves for the sake of others in the hope that they will make good the sacrifices that we have made on their account. There's a way in which times can be connected by that. If I make a vow or commitment to a particular place, I'm going to build a life in this particular place.

I'm going to commit myself to this particular community. It makes possibilities of endurance through time that would not be possible if I weren't someone who made and kept promises like that. In the same way, if I am someone who makes sacrifices for the generations yet to come and if I'm confident that they will take those sacrifices seriously, there's a unity through time that can be secured that would not be possible if people did not take the sacrifices of those who went before them seriously.

And so it seems to me that there are some virtues there that enable time to become this far thicker and richer medium than it often is when we don't keep our promises to ourselves, to each other, when we're people that don't really have a horizon that stretches out further than the next few weeks or few years even. I often find it striking hearing the story of Genesis again and thinking how long Abraham was looking forward into the future. This is a future-minded individual who's prepared to lay down a lot in sacrifice right now for the sake of what God has promised in the distant future.

And that sort of horizon just doesn't seem to be one that registers for us because everything is so much more immediate. And it seems to me perhaps because we've lost some of the virtues that enable us to think that far ahead. What are some of the virtues that you've found when you're thinking about time? The virtues that enable us to really get stuck into a thicker, richer form of time, shared perhaps as well.

Yeah, I think that well, I'm going to draw from Soren Kierkegaard here. Patience is a virtue that I think we misunderstand often because we import this concept of time onto the idea of patience. And patience, I always thought it was kind of waiting without complaint.

Like being able to just kind of grin and bear it and let time pass and not lose your mind

while it's passing. But Kierkegaard talks, he has discourses on patience that are beautiful. And he talks about it so differently.

And what's funny is he brings in the conversation about time to it as he's discussing patience. And he also brings in the conversation about the self becoming itself, the becoming nature of the self. But also the being nature, the being and the becoming of the self.

So he's bringing in patience, time, and selfhood together. Which means that there's something going on here that's a lot more than just I'm going to let the time pass, right, without complaint. And what he encourages his readers in is that patience does work.

Patience has its perfect work. Let patience have its perfect work because patience is not just moving through time, but it's actually allowing time to be able to have a formative effect on you. And so it's something, there are a lot of things that are happening through patience.

It also makes you a patient person. As you are patient, you become more of a patient person, right? But he talks about patience in connection with expectancy or I'll just say hope. That there's this dance between patience and hope.

Because hope is that for which we are patient. And it's the drive of our patients and it's what we set our sights on in our patients. As you were saying, this future orientation.

And hope is something that keeps patients from growing discouraged. It enlivens it, it emboldens it. So yeah, patience and expectancy are things that help us see that time is good and good things are happening in time.

So our experience of time, I imagine, has changed considerably over the years. One particular aspect of our lives today that I think is really important is greatly shapes our experience and practice of time is just online existence. And what are some of the ways that you think that the experience of the technology of the internet, social media, has altered or shaped or influenced our experience of time? Wow, well, everything's instant.

There's so many, but the first one that's coming to my mind is everything is instant. It doesn't force you to allow time to do work before you throw something out there, right? So it's easy to give a hasty response. It's easy to tweet something out that you haven't thought very much about or haven't had to do very much research.

It's this instant satisfaction that we have that's a really, really harming practice that malforms us in many ways. Whereas other mediums that force us to do deeper research, to think longer about that, to reflect on the fact that this is actually a real person that I'm talking to, not just an avatar or a picture or thumbnail. I think that changes things very, very quickly when things are not instant for us.

It's like it's a grace for us when they're not instant. One aspect of the instantaneous character of the internet is also its constant suffocating present. It's not actually, you don't have a sense of history on the internet.

Everything is the current moment, the cusp of the crashing wave, I think Oliver O'Donovan calls it. And to actually capture a true sense of the moment in which we live, it seems to me that we need some sense of where that moment has come from, the history that goes behind it. And news don't really make sense without olds, as it were, to correspond with them and to help us to see where have these events emerged from, where are we going from, and where are we heading towards? Yeah, I agree.

It's again the tyranny of the urgent. It's what's happening now and it gets us caught up in the what's happening now. And it's entire, we're just, we move along in this moment, this present moment, without thinking about the past and how it's connected or even future implications of this present moment.

It's just like, it's like the herd gets caught up in the here and now and in that very atomistic concept of time as well. And the way you talk about the reactions, as it were, and the herd instincts, whatever it is that drives us to react to things. There's something about the intervals of time, those times in which you have the ability to step back, to reflect, to deliberate, to meditate, that enable you to engage in time in a far more fruitful, responsive, and responsible way.

Yeah. Well, I found even thinking about different examples in my own life how time allowed me to see things differently. It adjusted my gaze.

It allowed things to appear as something that it didn't appear as before. So it's, the phenomenologists would call it this bracketing, right? Or a phenomenological reduction. And that's one of the benefits of the liturgical non-time space, is it kind of plucks you out for a moment and lets you look on things differently.

I think about the command to be reconciled with a brother or sister before taking the supper, and how that moment of self-reflection is so important because it does help you just see things differently, because it plucks you out of the the tearing of the urgent or the what's happening now, and gives things a different way of giving themselves to you. I find the movement of time in a generational way, very, as something that's tragically lost online a lot of the time. We all feel as if we're contemporaries, and elderly people online don't really appear as such.

It doesn't really feel that we're passing through movements of day and night either, or the movement of the week doesn't really register very much for its part. It's just one constant flow of undifferentiated time. But that particular transition from one generation to another, how can we, within our practice, hope to have that connection between times, the movement from one generation to another, as one that is healthy, where the

new generation isn't suffocated by the old, but there is something about the wisdom and the tempering effect of the older generation that can actually inform and empower the generation that's to come.

I think the person who talks about this most beautifully is Oliver O'Donovan. I think it's probably the final chapter in the third volume of the trilogy where he talks about the passing of the generations, and the humility that's needed on both sides, because on one hand you have a generation, a younger generation, that is living in a different time. And because it's living in a different time, there is a sense in which it's living in a different world than the old generation.

But the old generation has lived in a world, very fully in a world, and they're not two separate possible worlds, right? It's a connected one. And so he talks about the way that the older generation can fall into fear for the younger generation, but also that the younger generation can be frustrated with the older generation too, and how humility is needed on both sides. And I just think that that's such a beautiful picture.

I felt like I lived this out one time when I had a mentor, this older professor who's retiring, and he said to me, I want to help you in whatever way that I can, because the philosophical questions that I was involved in answering during my time, I recognize they're not the same questions that you and your generation is having to ask in your time. And if I try to impose and say, no, these are the questions, then I'm doing a disservice, right? So I can't do that, but what I can do is try to encourage and impart whatever wisdom I have to you as you are engaging with your peers in answering the questions of your age. And I was blown away by that.

That seems to me as an example of maybe how we can give time to other people in a way that isn't just giving a few minutes here and there, but something more about the quality of time that maybe we've developed wisdom or maybe we have time in the sense of many years out ahead of us that we can give to people who don't have many years left to live out some of their, to give some reward, as it were, some outcome for their sacrifices that they have made and trying to carry forward some of the energy that they have put into particular projects. What are some of the ways that you think we can give time to people and that time can be a form of charity? Well, I think about working for one another. We're doing work.

We're all spending our time differently during our regular rhythms of the day. And so because I'm focusing my efforts doing one thing, it's going to be different from the efforts that, where you're focusing your efforts. But I think in conversation, I think in the gifts we give together to each other and different ways that we engage with one another it's like we're giving the other the fruit of our labor and vice versa.

And it's a way that I think about even in dialogues like this where I'm learning from you things that I did not know before and it's thanks to the time that you've invested at



reading things or thinking through things that I haven't and vice versa. And I think that's a great way that we can consider our work and working for the other and we can think about that as a way of giving time to the other. One way I've found helpful is just thinking about slowing down.

To give time to people in part is to live life on their rhythm. I think particularly the way that we relate to the poor and the needy within our communities. They live time in a very different way, particularly the elderly for instance.

It's very difficult to live time at the speed of youth when you're an old age. You don't have the energy anymore. You experience time very differently in part because of the importance that memory has perhaps.

You're looking back upon things that have passed and also the way that you view the future is very different from those who are younger. And so maybe that challenge of giving time to each other is the challenge of inhabiting for some time someone else's time. Their patterns of life, their rhythm and within that to have some way that we can serve them but also just be present to them.

That time becomes a common time for some period. And how do you think that doing that might actually work for our own upbuilding, inhabiting someone else's time? How do you think that might be formative for us? But apart from anything else it does form a community. The way in which we can bring people together in a single time.

I think music is a great example of this. Music is a particular way of expressing time and when you have many people singing a particular song together or creating a particular piece of music, there is a unity that's formed out of many different persons even in the expression of their diversity playing different musical instruments, singing different lines of melody, whatever it is, that brings them together as a single whole and helps them to see one another in that moment in a way that they would not within the sort of discordance of all our own separate times. In the church, I think there's also part of that, that feasting together is a big thing.

Taking that time out to just rejoice together and that you're slowing down your life for other people and you're spending time with them. You're not checking your clock. You're not trying to hasten things.

There's a sense in which you're stepping back and you're giving rest to yourself and you're giving rest to others and within that I think there is a deeper experience of what things like our work mean. When you've stepped back from that, the work is no longer just my work detached from everyone else. I'm trying to serve my own ends.

There's a sense in which the gifts and the resources that are formed during my week can be coordinated into this common experience of festivity, of sabbath, and in those sorts of

ways, I think it is, there are great possibilities in shared time to give to each other. Also the way in which people of different ages can give of their time in, for instance, the sacrifice of the many years that our parents gave to raising us. I think there's a lot of sacrifice of time there and the way in which I'm sure as a kid I fragmented my mum's time particularly quite considerably and there's an investment of concern and all these sorts of things that hopefully at this point I'm able to give something back for that.

But that time is never just my own. There's a sense in which I wouldn't have this were it not for the many people who have invested time in me, who have shared times with me, who have opened up new possibilities and horizons of time for me. I often feel that when in a situation of teaching that there is a relationship between distemporaries in the teaching environment.

There is someone who's inhabiting a time that has gone before who's trying to give something to people in the time that comes forward. It's not just a shared time. There is a movement across times and that I think is an exciting possibility within the life of the church more generally.

We hold traditions. We teach children and we teach those who have come up who come after us to continue things, to remember, to look forward to things. But there's also always this gift.

We have to be dispossessed of something in order for that to work well. If we're trying to control the time after us, it never actually works in the fruitful way that it should. No, that's exactly right.

And I think about in the concept of dispossession too and truly giving it to the other. The metaphor of the dance is so beautiful. I think as just even a philosophical category of relationality where it's one where you have this co-being without a collapsing into the other.

You can maintain your distinction, your distinctiveness, and you actually grow in your differentiation, but you live together in harmony with the other and not separate from the other. And so I'm thinking about time. We talk about working for the other and having shared experiences of time and that time is not strictly just our own.

In what ways is our time our own and what's the line with sharing time with the other? So that we don't form into some kind of conglomerate hole. But it's more like the distinctive parts forming this harmonious dance. How would you envision that? Yeah, I think it will vary from person to person because we all have different ways of making time our own.

I find times of solitude are incredibly important for me. If I don't have times of solitude, I don't get to form the self that I can give to other people. And so taking time to read in

silence, to disconnect from the movement of time that is just constant within my inbox, for instance, or on my Twitter feed, whatever it is.

There is a time there that is operative in that realm. This is not healthy for me if I'm going to take time out for myself in order that later on I should be able to give something of a rhythm, something of a deposit that I've created that I can give to other people to take them forward. And so that time of solitude is a realm in which we can create a stronger self, but it's never a self just for ourselves.

It's a self that we can give to other people and that enables us, among other things, to relate to time not just as something that we're subject to, but something that we're able to relate to in a thoughtful way. So there are times when I slow down, I change my temporality. I'm not moving at the same pace.

And there are other times when I will speed things up, I will take actions in a different rhythm. And that taking of time, I think, enables us to be those who live in time a bit more responsibly and responsibly. We have a capacity as a result that we would not have if we're just following the impulse and the urgency and the demands, the imperatives of the time that is just imposed upon us from without.

Yeah, I think it gives us a sense of agency in time, which if you think about it, it's this idea of responsible agency. It's dignifying, right? It's not that we're simply at the mercy of time. We have ways that we can move about intentionally in it, but it's also different from this mastery over time that we experience when we have the time as our stopwatch and we're scheduling everything.

We're controlling our time. And do you have any ideas for ways that we can helpfully articulate the difference between mastery over time, but then it's opposite being being mastered by time? And instead have this empowered, responsible, dignified serving agency. How are those things different? I think one of the differences is found in the virtue of humility that time is something that humbles us because we can't master it and we do feel its effects upon us.

We feel its limitations. For instance, we feel that time, for want of a better way of putting it, and I do want a better way of putting it, there is an opportunity cost. When I devote my life to particular ends, there are other ends that I can't devote it to.

We also feel the way in which our, even our mortality, our death is ultimately a giving up. There's a way we don't have infinite time and time is ultimately going to be taken from us. And at that point you realize that there is a lot that my life, its meaning, depends upon what happens next often.

If I've devoted my life to certain causes and those causes are just abandoned by those who come after me, there is a retrospective impact upon the meaning of my life. But if I

do devote myself to these things and other people take them up afterwards, there can be a great meaning to my life that I don't recognize within the course of my life, but afterwards becomes apparent. And so that sense of the fact that we're not the masters of the meaning of our time, that there is a way in which we can find meaning in that time.

I think that's very much the story or the themes of the book of Ecclesiastes. It's exploring what it means to be mortal, not to be masters of time, and yet to find meaning in it nonetheless and beauty that there is a vaporous character to human existence, that vapor is transitory. It doesn't really leave a mark behind.

It's something that you can't really grasp. You can't control it. It's not something that you can see through.

It's obfuscating. And in many other ways, it is something that prevents our desire to, our hubristic desire to be able to control and to be the masters of existence. But yet in faith, the possibility that you can cast your bread on the waters and it returned to you after many days.

And that many days I think is important. There is an interval there that is precisely that humbling interval that reminds you of your lack of control. But yet, recognizing your lack of control and recognizing that there is one who has control, there is a freedom that comes, I think, to inhabit time in a different way.

A way of inhabiting time that isn't about control, but nor is it about this sort of fatalistic surrender either. There is a joy that can operate in the open-handed way that we treat our time, that we hold it open to others, recognizing well, I can invest in things that there's not certain whether they can come to fruition or not. That's not the most important thing.

The most important thing is that I'm living my life towards the Lord. And as I do that, there is a freedom to inhabit time in a way that is not bound by time, but in a way that is genuinely humbled by time. I recognize I'm going to throw up like grass in the morning and then I'll wither in the evening.

There's a limitation to me. And yet, there's a beauty to that as well. Yeah, I really love that image because it's so different from a nihilistic way of viewing time, which interestingly also views time as inherently disintegrating of the self.

But instead of trying to find some underlying x by which we can persist through time, it's more of just this embracing of the fragmenting of time and not expecting anything else from it. And that's not at all what I get from the Book of Ecclesiastes, is some sort of despair over time. But it's also a critique of the mastery over time and thinking that watch me achieve these certain things and project myself in ways that I know are just

going to work out, you know, or last forever.

But the casting the bread upon the waters, it's, my pastor actually recently did a sermon series through Ecclesiastes and he said this frequently, we don't know but we sow. And I think I tell myself that every day while I write my dissertation. I don't know.

I don't know what the future is going to bring. And I, my work here right now is to sow, which is different from mastermind making things happen, right? There's a faithful sowing and a letting and giving it to God and seeing what he does as a result of it. And so every day when I'm sowing, I do so because of the time that God has given me and it's a grace and it's a gift and it's not something that I master, but it's something that I am able to take and see fruitfulness that comes as a result of it, fruitfulness that ultimately God brings from it.

As we draw to a conclusion, I'd be interested to hear any thoughts that you have on the subject of death. And Christians have often given a lot of attention to meditating upon death, being reminded of death as something that is not just humbling, but something that gives us a sense of what the time of our lives means. How can we fruitfully relate to death? I love Ecclesiastes for that too.

Heidegger talks a lot about recognizing your mortality and having this angst that comes as a result of that mortality. I think what he's meaning by that really is to recognize that you're a finite being and that your days are limited and you don't know what they are. But I think that for the Christian there's a fundamentally different posture towards that than some sort of angst, which is either going to lead me to cram everything in now.

Well, I can because I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. So if I'm going to this is my chance to make a mark on the world, right? And it's also not this despair of, you know, Aristotle was born, he lived and then he died. And I remember that this hit me so so hard when my grandfather passed away because my grandparents had purchased a plot of land at a cemetery for them to be buried beside one another.

And like the planners that they were, they already had this tombstone out there before they even had passed away. And we went to go see it one day and it had both of their names beside each other and it had their birth year. But then there was nothing, it was blank where the death year was supposed to be.

And I just thought that was so ominous, but also kind of meaningful at the same time, you know, because I'm looking at my grandfather and he was alive at that point. And I remember going to the funeral and then being at the graveside and looking at that exact same tombstone and seeing the death date carved into it. But then seeing my grandmother's that it was her birth date was there, but her death date is still, she's still living.

So it's not carved yet. And so just looking, I think about that image when I think about death and I think about time as gift. And I think that completely changes, for the Christian recognizing that there's resurrection on the other side, right? This isn't the end of it.

That changes everything. Resurrection truly changes everything and it changes even our perception of time and helps us to even see the gift-like characteristics of time even more clearly. The fact that we will be dispossessed of time, I think as you say, it really alerts us to the fact that time is not our possession.

It's something that's been granted to us. And as a result, there is a sort of freedom that we can have approaching death that I don't think non-Christians can enjoy to the same degree. And also that experience of death is related to the experience of the seasonality of life, that our lives are not just this unrelenting movement through a single season of life and an unchanging way of experiencing time.

But we go through different seasons and there's a beauty to that as well that the world changes, we change. And there are times when we spend more time looking back than looking forward and there are times when our lives are characterized by the openness of possibilities of youth and other times when it seems as if the possibilities have been exhausted, but there's a beauty within what has been realized through time that would not be seen in these merely open possibilities. There's something about a specific course that has been struck.

It's concrete. Yes. Yeah, it's rendered real.

Yeah. Thank you so much for joining me. This has been a very interesting and thought-provoking conversation and I hope it's been so for the people who have listened as well.

Absolutely. It's my pleasure being here. Thank you so much for the invitation.

If you would like to hear any more about these subjects, what would you recommend as reading material, other resources for people who want to look deeper? Well, I would off the bat mention the two things that I mentioned today. One, Kierkegaard's discourses on patience are beautiful. He has, there's three or four of them, patience and expectancy in his upbuilding discourses.

So I would highly recommend those. Also, Jean-Yves Lacoste, anything by him is going to be excellent and actually O'Donovan translated one of his works. But I would highly recommend reading Jean-Yves Lacoste too.

Wonderful. Thank you very much. God bless and thank you for listening.