



Roanoke, Virginia

June 15, 2025

“Saving Time for What?”

Ephesians 5:15-16, Luke 10:38-42

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We had a wonderful *Evening Bible School* with Dr. Ed McLeod. I did my best to be a good host—which included joining him for a couple of rounds of golf. And yes, even on the golf course, church work can get done.

Standing on the first tee at Hanging Rock, Ed asked what I was preaching on this Sunday. When I told him, he said, [“I’ve got a story you’ll want to use.”](#)

He was right.

The story comes from a sermon by Dr. Lamar Williamson. He was on the planning team for a big-city church conference and offered to pick up a missionary flying in from Africa. He got to the airport early, helped with the bags, and said, [“Come with me—I know a shortcut to the car. It’ll save us time.”](#)

“Wonderful,” the missionary replied.

Then, on the way to the church, Lamar warned him: [“I am not staying on the interstate. Traffic’s bad, but I know backroads that’ll get us there quicker.”](#)

“Wonderful,” the missionary said again.

Along the way, Lamar kept pointing out all the time they were saving with the shortcuts- a minute here, a few minutes there. But then he stopped at a convenience store to get a few needed items. When he came out, the missionary was gone.



- Not in the store.
- Not in the car.
- Not in the parking lot.

Eventually, Lamar found him sitting on a bench across the street looking out over a park. “What are you doing over here?” he asked.

“Well,” the missionary said, “we were saving so much time... I thought I’d *enjoy* some of it.”

Hold on to that story as we listen to our two scripture readings today.

- First, from Ephesians: a call *to make the most of time*.
- And then from Luke: a scene in which Martha accuses her sister Mary of doing exactly the opposite—*wasting time*.

Ephesians 5:15-16:

¹⁵ Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Luke 10:38-42:

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus’s feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

We live in a culture that has gotten *very* good at *saving* time—
while also making us feel like we’re *wasting* it.

It used to take forever to read a road map:

- unfold it,
- squint at the index,
- match the coordinates,
- trace your route,
- write the directions down so you don’t drive with your map on the steering wheel.

Now you just speak your destination into a phone, and a calm voice with an Australian accent guides you there.



Or think about email. So much faster than letters (writing, folding, addressing, posting).
Email: Instant. No envelopes. No stamps. So much time saved.

Or Siri. Alexa. Or whatever name you've given ChatGPT. Your digital assistant can answer questions, schedule appointments, even dictate your grocery list.

All these tools promise to help us *do less*. But often, they just help us *do more* and *faster*.

- Schedules fill up.
- To Dos add up.
- Life speeds up.

And instead of feeling more in control, many of us feel... behind.

Ed asked on Monday night how many people had heard of the theologian Andy Root. He expected a good number of hands—mainly because I've been reading Root's books and quoting him in a lot of sermons. (Now is a good time to remind you that in November, Andy Root will be our 2025 Edmunds Lecturer.)

Root argues that in our culture, time has become a commodity—something to manage, optimize, and trade. That's why so many apps promise to “[buy back your time](#).” Just:

- text instead of call
- Zoom instead of drive
- binge instead of wait.

But do these shortcuts carve out time for better living?

Root says that, more often than not, our obsession with these shortcuts makes us *anxious*. We no longer receive time as a gift from God—we treat it like a resource we have to prove we're using wisely by *doing even more*. And in our secular world, where there's little sense of eternity, maximizing how we spend time feels even more *urgent*—because it's all we think we have.

So, as we get better at *saving* time, many of us are forgetting how to *live* within it.

This brings us to the story of Mary and Martha.

Jesus is in their home. So are others. There is much to be done, and Martha is doing it: preparing, serving, cleaning. But she's frustrated. Her sister Mary isn't helping. She's just sitting at Jesus' feet.

So Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help.

But Jesus answers gently: “**Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. Mary has chosen the better part.**”

Now, before we throw Martha under the bus—which, by the way, she probably packed, cleaned, and drove—remember, she's got Scripture on her side—verses that praise hard work, faithful service, and warn us about idleness.

- Genesis tells us to be fruitful.
- The Law is full of commands about what to do—
 - and what not to do.



- Proverbs reminds us, “[Consider the ant, you sluggard!](#)”
- Even Jesus, in other moments, says he prefers *doers of God’s will* to *those who just talk about it*.
- James agrees: “[Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only.](#)”

So, the message of our Mary/Martha passage isn’t that *doing is bad*. The question isn’t whether Mary or Martha is better. The question of the passage concerning *time...is timing*.

- When is *just sitting there* a waste of time—
 - and when is *just sitting there* an act of faith?
- When is saving time wise-
 - and when does saving time just make us more distracted?

The world around us isn’t helping us here. The secular world doesn’t understand our idle practices of worship, study, prayer and fellowship. They don’t seem *efficient*.

- Why be wasteful with Sunday mornings when there is *so* much to do?
- Why be wasteful with prayer when time’s a-wasting?

But, Ephesians reminds us that if all our time-saving just leads to more rushing and more anxiety, maybe we’re not saving time at all. Maybe we’re losing it. To “[make the most of time](#)” is not to fill every moment, but to remember that time itself is a gift from God.

It’s a subtle distinction, but

- do we rush to save time to spend it,
- or do we live wisely within the time God has given us?

Given Ephesians’ command not to waste time, Marva Dawn offers surprising advice. She says that the best way to wisely live within time is to *waste* some of it. Her book about worship is called, *A Royal Waste of Time*.

Andy Root agrees. He says the church should be one of the few places where people can “[waste time well.](#)” Because if all our saving just leads to more distraction, more pressure, and more emptiness, then we’re not really saving time at all. We’re being consumed by it. Sabbath-pauses give us power to rebel against the tyranny of the urgent. They remind us of what is essential- that our lives are gifts and they are to be lived with purpose, passion, compassion and love.

Walter Brueggemann, who just went to his true glory last week, said it beautifully in *Sabbath as Resistance*:

“[The divine rest of the sabbath day of creation makes clear that Yabweh is not a workaholic, that Yabweh is not anxious about the full functioning of creation, and that the well-being of creation does not depend on endless work.](#)”¹

¹From *Sabbath as Resistance*.



That is good news!

It frees us from the pressure to save time just to spend it, trade it, hoard it, or prove we used it well.

Those who can stand up to empires and the anxieties of the world are those who know that their time belongs only to God.

Real freedom, real wisdom, real faith— they begin not when we save more time, but when we remember how to *live within time* as a gift.

So again, I ask you, as Dr. Lamar Williamson had to ask himself:

What are you saving time for?

