

# The Irretrievable Blessing: Time

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One of the characteristics of believers is revealed in the Qur'an as follows:

“Those who turn away from worthless talk.” (Surat al-Mu`minun, 3)

“When they hear worthless talk they turn away from it...” (Surat al-Qasas, 55)

While God directs people to keep away from vain and useless words, He also mentions of the believers. Here, together with a criterion that must be observed, a characteristic found in the life and character of a person of faith is set forth. A believer is a person who turns away from vain talk and does not waste his time and attention in pursuit of worthless things.

These verses have profound traces in the life of a person whose heart is filled with the love of God. For him, keeping away from vain things is a natural part of his life. A person who loves God naturally refrains from things that may draw him away from God.

A person thinks of and remembers the one he loves, takes an interest in the one he values, and his eyes seek to find the one he is searching for. Love determines not only a person's feelings, but also his time, attention, interests and what he expects from life.

The greatest quest in the life of a person who loves God with all his heart is also to turn to Him. To know his Lord with all his strength, to submit to Him with his entire being, to seek His approval with all his attention, to seek ways of drawing closer to Him with love and fervor, and to shape his life around these quests are the most fundamental purpose of his life.

For a person whose heart is filled with such a profound love of God, pursuits that draw him away from God, consume his time and add no value to his life already hold no attraction. Talking at length about the lives of others, investigating people's faults, following who did what, pursuing gossip or spending hours in fruitless arguments are entirely meaningless for a person who seeks to draw closer to God.

A person whose priority in life is to be a servant of God does not pursue every word, follow every curiosity or become involved in every argument. Gossip, curiosity about the lives of others, constantly following what people say and do, talking about the faults of others, devoting hours to fruitless arguments and many other pursuits belonging to the life of this world provide no benefit to a person. The fundamental criterion that determines whether a task, behavior, word, curiosity or discussion is worthy of attention is whether or not it draws a person closer to God. One who loves God gives no place in his life to things that will draw him away from God or weaken his turning toward Him.

Yet of course, in the natural course of life, a person may take an interest in various subjects, sometimes talk about them with others, watch a game, follow social media and current events, or take an interest in hobbies he enjoys, such as fashion or sports. The characteristic of one who loves God is that he does not place any of these at the center of his life. He does not allow them to become an occupation that will draw him away from God, needlessly consume his time or detach his heart from its true purpose.



Life is not long enough to devote hours to every subject. Spending hours on arguments that yield no result and taking a prolonged interest in things that will provide no benefit will not draw a

person closer to God, make any genuine contribution to him, or improve either his soul or his personality. Moreover, after a while, a person will forget the matters to which he devoted time and the subjects he argued about, and the words he spoke or heard from the other party will lose their importance. Yet the time spent will never return.

In this respect, time is different from all other blessings. Lost property may be regained, and a damaged object may be replaced. But lost time can never be recovered. Time continually runs out like the sand in an hourglass, without our even noticing it. While we think we are living our lives forward, life is constantly counting backward. Every passing day brings us a little closer to the final day of our lives.

When a person gives an hour of his life to an unnecessary argument, he can never get that hour back. The time he spends talking about the lives of others is deducted from the time he could use to beautify his own life in the Hereafter. An hour spent seeking a useless curiosity ceases to be an hour in which he could remember God, read the Qur'an, improve himself, perform a good deed or devote time to his family and loved ones.

Satan plays a major role in swaying a person toward such quests that draw him away from his true purpose. Yet when the Day of Reckoning comes, satan will deny his own responsibility by saying that he had no power over man and will blame him for his own choices. In the Qur'an, the words satan will speak on that day are revealed as follows:

"When the affair is decided satan will say, 'God made you a promise, a promise of truth, and I made you a promise but broke my promise. I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. Do not, therefore, blame me but blame yourselves. I cannot come to your aid nor you to mine. I reject the way you associated me with God before.' The wrongdoers will have a painful punishment." (Surah Ibrahim, 22)

When a person leaves himself idle, his mind and life will not remain empty. The mind will certainly occupy itself with something, and a person will certainly seek something. If he does not direct his attention toward God, the Qur'an and good deeds, other pursuits will fill this space. In his work titled *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Imam al-Ghazali compares the heart to a house or a fortress and satan to an enemy trying to enter that house, and states that when the heart is not filled with remembrance, knowledge and good deeds, it becomes easier for satan to enter it.

"Know that the heart is like a fortress and satan is an enemy who wishes to enter the fortress, to take possession of it, and to rule over it."

"If the house is not filled with the remembrance of God, knowledge and good deeds, its doors remain open, and satan easily enters and settles there."

The following words attributed to Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi are also thought-provoking in this respect:

"God is not pleased for a thought other than Himself to enter the heart of His servant. The house of the heart must be protected from thoughts that are contrary to God's approval. For the heart is God's treasury, and the person is its treasurer. Thoughts other than thoughts of God are highwaymen. They must not be allowed to enter the heart."

The true loss for a person is not losing his property or some material possession, but losing the opportunity to attain the Hereafter. As revealed in Surat al-'Asr, those who are saved from loss are those who have faith, perform righteous deeds, and counsel one another to truth and patience.

"By the Late Afternoon, truly man is in loss – except for those who have faith and do right actions and urge each other to the truth and urge each other to steadfastness." (Surat al-'Asr, 1-3)

When the Day of Reckoning comes, vain things will abandon a person, and only what he devoted his life to will remain with him. On that day, details about the lives of others, gossip, unnecessary arguments, what people thought and did, and the countless temporary pursuits of the life of this world will all be left behind. In the Book of Deeds handed to him that day, a person will find not the lives of others but only his own life, and not what others did but what he himself did. The Qur'an reveals the sight a person will encounter on that day as follows:

"The Book will be set in place and you will see the evildoers fearful of what is in it. They will say, 'Alas for us! What is this Book which does not pass over any action, small or great, without recording it?' They will find there everything they did and your Lord will not wrong anyone at all." (Surat al-Kahf, 49)

On such a day, when even words and deeds regarded as insignificant in this world will confront a person, the true value of the time spent saying, "**It is not important anyway**" will be understood. The Qur'an reveals the regret a person experiences on that day as follows:

"When death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord, send me back again. So that perhaps I may act rightly regarding the things I failed to do!'... " (Surat al-Mu'minun, 99-100)

A person who spent the life of this world running after vain deeds will say on that day, **“If only I had turned toward God more, if only I had striven harder to put the verses of the Qur'an into practice, if only I had improved myself more, if only I had concerned myself with my own shortcomings instead of occupying myself with other people, if only I had not wasted my life on vain things, if only I had prepared more provisions for my Hereafter”**, but there will no longer be any way to return. The believer who turned toward God in this world will say on that day, in great joy and peace:

“As for him who is given his Book in his right hand, he will say, ‘Here, come and read my Book! I counted on meeting my Reckoning.’” (Surat al-Haqqah, 19-20)

One of the greatest blessings a person possesses at this moment is that he is still alive and still has time to attain the Hereafter. While he is still alive, a person has the opportunity to prepare for this beautiful end. He can change himself, make up for his shortcomings, turn away from his errors, free himself from vain pursuits and turn toward God with all his heart. A sincere step he takes may be the beginning of salvation from regret on the Day of Reckoning.

