

Joan Chittister

# THE MONASTIC WAY

JANUARY 2022

*Time does not change us.*

*It just unfolds us.* - MAX FRISCH

## AS TIME GOES BY

Every country on earth has some kind of cliché attached that portends to describe the personality characteristics of its people. Germans are hard-working, the conventional wisdom concludes; the French are romantic; the Irish are fun-loving; the Swiss are efficient. The labels go all the way around the globe. And there's a bit of truth to all of them and a lot of error, as well. But whatever the balance of truth in the markers, the conviction that there are such things as national characteristics cling to a people like oil on rock. The labels say something about the qualities a people value, about the nature of their culture, about their priorities.

My young father, dead at 25, left nothing behind for me to have except his prayer book and one prayer card. I read it over and over as a child. It's been gone for years but I remember parts of it yet. It read:

*I have only just a minute,  
Only 60 seconds in it.  
Given to me, didn't choose it.  
Mustn't waste it, can't refuse it  
But I must suffer if I lose it.*

There was more to that doggerel, of course, but I have forgotten that by now. But not its message. On the contrary, the basic message got through to me and haunted me all my life: It was legacy enough for the rest of my life.

The American mantra, I learned, is time. We are, in fact, obsessed with time. We're a pragmatic, productive people and time is the national God. It shows in our language.



KAREN BUKOWSKI

No other people on earth speak of time as we do. We spend time and invest time and need time and lose time and save time and waste time and find time and buy time and gain time and want time. And, in the end, time, not life, threatens to absorb us.

Time, the American assumes, is for doing something, for producing things, for achieving goals. And in our commitment to pragmatism and effectiveness, we far too often fail to realize that life is really about becoming a person of merit and worth.

As another year begins, it might be useful to take a moment a day to give more serious consideration to what we are becoming rather than to what we are doing as time goes by.



If the monastic life teaches us anything, it teaches us to seek God, to find God everywhere. The monastic learns that God speaks to the heart in many tongues. This year's *Monastic Way* looks at the insights of great writers and asks the question, What of God is in this for me?

*Time does not change us.*

*It just unfolds us.* - MAX FRISCH

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 1:** A life is not a package of years; it is a lifetime of opportunities meant to make us everything we can possibly be: gentle, understanding, open and holy. "Time does not change us," Max Frisch says. "It just unfolds us."

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 2:** It is never, ever too late to be different. But it may already be too late to go on as we have in the past. In which case, it is time to change.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 3:** The one thing we cannot have back is time. Make every moment count where love is concerned.

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 4:** Whatever we amass in things is nowhere near the value of what we amass in the riches of a life lived deeply, lived well. "All my possessions," Queen Elizabeth I said on her death bed, "for a moment of time."

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5:** The important thing is not to think of life in terms of time spent doing things but in terms of time spent appreciating things.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 6:** The purpose of time is to grow us to the full stature of ourselves: to become strong and loving, courageous and persevering, generous and joyful. "Time's violence," Simone Weil wrote, "rends the soul; by the rent eternity enters."

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 7:** We cannot parcel time, much as we try. In all its segments we are becoming only the more of our whole self, not a piece of it, as in husband, athlete, socialite, mother. In the end, we are no single thing; just a composite of all of them.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 8:** "Time and space," Edith Nesbit writes, "are only

forms of thought." The truth is that what and who is in us are in us all the time. There is no such thing as distance, as space, as years.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 9:** In moving through life, the important thing is that we let no single time period in life consume us, or stop us, or deter us from becoming the rest of ourselves.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 10:** There is really no such thing as time when something outside ourselves is not pushing us, pulling us, from one moment to the next. "Time, when it is left to itself and no definite demands are made on it," Edith Wharton writes, "cannot be trusted to move at any recognized pace." The trick of a hectic life then is to keep for ourselves space enough for the soul to bloom alone and in the dark.

**TIME IS MEANT TO GIVE US  
THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LIFE,  
NOT THE MISTAKE  
OF IGNORING IT.**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 11:** Time is the great teacher. It teaches us to forget what has nothing to do with today and to remember that whatever happened yesterday, there is still a tomorrow enough to make it right.

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12:** Time carries us from level to level of life, giving every stage of it the wisdom of its own past.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 13:** To hurry through life, running frantically from one thing to another, is to leave the soul behind.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 14:** There is no such thing, psychologists know now, as "multi-tasking." To do two things at once simply means that neither of them gets our full attention.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 15:** Computers were supposed to save us time. Instead, they simply demand that we do more faster and always. It is time for a revolution.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 16:** There was a time when it took months, even years, for a question to spread from one end of Europe to another. By that time, people had already figured out what needed to be done before anyone could send them an answer. Our problem now is that we send answers before anyone understands the question.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 17:** Fortunately, no one is ever stuck in any one stage of life—cemented in that ignorance, smothered in the arrogance appropriate to an earlier time. Instead, we grow old: life's singular blessing. Or as Sara Teasdale says, "Time is a kind friend, he will make us old."

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 18:** Time is made for more than doing. It is also made for joy, for fun, for friends and for finding new ways to enjoy life. Don't forget this year to give those things at least as much attention as you give the others. "Whiskey and music, I reflected," Jean Stafford wrote, "especially when taken together, made time fly incredibly fast."

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19:** To be time-bound is to worry every minute of your life: Will the meeting start on time? Will we get out in time? Will we have time to get everything done? Will I be on time for the next appointment? And round and round and round again. There is a calmer, better, more serene way to go through life. Just remember, as Alice Caldwell Rice says, "It ain't no use putting up your umbrella till it rains."

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 20:** Time is a kind teacher. It enables us to correct every mistake we make. Take advantage of it always. It's so much easier than taking the time to justify every error.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 21:** Time is what fools us into thinking that we have forever to be stubborn or unkind or destructive or judgmental of others. But if we don't, then what?

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 22:** It's not possible to love life and live as if you don't, as if there is no time for living instead of simply existing. "Dost thou love life?" Benjamin Franklin wrote, "then do not squander time; for that is the stuff life is made of."

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 23:** Life is an exercise in the spiritual, the beautiful, the relational, and the physical. Which one are you? Which one are you most likely to ignore? This can be the year to change that, to really begin to live all of life instead of only part of it.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 24:** When we live more in the past than the present, we lag behind our own development.

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 25:** When we live more in the future than in the present, we spend life on what doesn't exist and, more importantly, may never exist.

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26:** When we ignore the present, we barter all the life we may ever have again. "The first

thing necessary for a constructive dealing with time," the psychiatrist Rollo May writes, "is to learn to live in the reality of the present moment. For psychologically speaking, this present moment is all we have."

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**THURSDAY, JANUARY 27:** The great temptation of life is to spend our time saving up what we'll leave behind. But what we leave behind will never make up for what we missed while we were here.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 28:** Time is the thief that leads us to cavalierly dismiss the present in favor of a future that never comes. As Paul Simon wrote, "Time, time, time,/ see what's become of me,/ While I looked around,/ For my

possibilities./ I was so hard to please./ But look around,/ leaves are brown/ And the sky/ is a hazy shade of winter."

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 29:** Time is meant to give us the opportunity for life, not the mistake of ignoring it. "Time wasted," Edward Young writes, "is existence; time used is life."

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 30:** It is a mistake to try to stop time, to resist change, to stop the kinds of development needed in each age and stage of life. It is also spiritual immaturity.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 31:** When you're tempted this year to make time your God, remember that wag who, when asked to define time, said with more wisdom than intelligence something it could behoove us all to remember: "Time," he wrote on the sidewalk, "is what keeps everything from happening all at one time." Hmmp.



## LET'S SHARE OUR THOUGHTS

The following discussion questions, Scripture echoes, journal prompts, and prayer are meant to help you reflect more deeply on *The Monastic Way*. Choose at least two suggestions and respond to them. You may do it as a personal practice or gather a group interested in sharing the spiritual journey. Once a month *The Monastic Way* staff will convene a Zoom conference where you can share your insights. Three times a year Sister Joan Chittister will join that Zoom conference to give more input and respond to your questions and ideas regarding one issue of *The Monastic Way*.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. COVID-19 drastically altered how we spent daily time. What effect did this disruption of the normal have on your life? Do you look at time differently now? Explain. Did the pandemic enable you "to give more serious consideration to what you are becoming rather than to what you are doing as time goes by?" Why or why not?
2. Which daily quote in *The Monastic Way* is most meaningful to you? Why? Do you agree with it? Disagree? Did it inspire you? Challenge you? Raise questions for you?
3. After reading *The Monastic Way*, write one question that you would like to ask the author about this month's topic.
4. Joan Chittister uses other literature to reinforce and expand her writing. Find another quote, poem, story, song, art piece, novel that echoes the theme of this month's *Monastic Way*.
5. On January 23, Sister Joan wrote: "Life is an exercise in the spiritual, the beautiful, the relational, and the physical. Which one are you? Which one are you most likely to ignore?" Answer her questions and then consider her advice: "This can be the year to change that, to really begin to live all of life instead of only part of it."

## SCRIPTURE ECHO

*Teach us to number our days aright,  
that we may gain wisdom of heart.*

—PSALM 90

How do you understand this psalm verse?  
What does “wisdom of heart” mean to you?

## JOURNAL PROMPTS

**Prompt 1:** Here are a few statements from this month’s *Monastic Way*. Choose one that is most helpful to you and journal with it.

- The one thing we cannot have back is time.
- To hurry through life... is to leave the soul behind.
- Time is a kind teacher. It enables us to correct every mistake we’ve made.

**Prompt 2:** Spend a few minutes with this photograph and journal about its relationship to this month’s *Monastic Way*. You can do that with prose or a poem or a song or....



KAREN BUKOWSKI

## PRAYER

*For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every purpose under heaven....  
God made everything beautiful in its time.*

—ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 11

### Joan Chittister FUND FOR PRISONERS

**“Prisoners are the most forgotten people in society and the least served in Christianity. Help me change that.”**

—Joan Chittister

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A donation of \$12.00 will send a one-year subscription to a prisoner that can:

- provide beauty to battered and bleak lives
- deliver daily positive reflective messages to stir the heart and seed the soul
- enable caring conversations that give people in prison something to believe in and a sense of the presence of God in themselves

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**JOAN CHITTISTER** is an internationally known author and lecturer and a clear visionary voice across all religions. She has written more than 60 books and received numerous awards for her writings and work on behalf of peace and women in the church and in society.

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