

“Slow Dance”
Genesis 1:1-5, Ecclesiastes 1:1-3, 3:1-13

2024 Trends

Happy New Year! Today is the first Sunday of 2024. How has your new year been so far? Good I hope. The New Year always brings hope and expectations for the future. We want to know how the unfolding new year will look, so I have read an analysis of predictions for the trends we'll see in 2024. Among many, there are two key terms that have caught my attention, they are 'time efficient society' and 'dopamine farming.' Are you familiar with these concepts? One millennial analyst said, due to the side effects of smartphones and the influence of social media, people, especially, younger generations, have become "time-sensitive perfectionists heavily reliant on instant gratification." In the old days when we watched a dumb television program for entertainment and we didn't have many choices as to what to watch, and we had to endure 2 minutes commercial breaks every 15 minutes.

However, the world has changed. How many of you use your smartphone to watch YouTube or videos? I am glad that many young people are here! When you watch a video on your smartphone or smartTV, how many of you watch movies or shows from the beginning to the end without skipping a part? I am glad that many old people are here! Nowadays, we have control over the programs we watch. Entertainment is in the palm of our hands and the moment we unlock our screens, our minds dive into another hyper-social dimension. This addictive world offers quick pleasure through the release of dopamine, which is known as the feel-good hormone. Dopamine farming refers to our inclination to seek quick dopamine spikes. This tendency seems to make us time-sensitive and forces us to use our time efficiently. For instance, people no longer watch videos at the original speed but, instead, opt for double speed or to skip some parts. Additionally, individuals may prefer watching movie recap videos rather than the entire film. In other words, people continuously seek more stimulation and quick pleasure within a short time. The analyst did not evaluate whether this trend is good or bad, but just describes it as it is. This analysis simply indicates that our society is moving in this direction and we are also influenced by this social trend. What do you think of the rise of this trend? As a Christian, we cannot simply comply with the world we live in.

Time

Genesis and Ecclesiastes offer us wisdom to counter the trend of the negative aspects of these social trends, 'time efficient society' and 'dopamine farming.' Genesis 1 tells that God created the world and yet one important initiative was the construction of time. "God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day."(3-5) The creation story in the Genesis includes the beginning of time. Time began to flow. Linear time is measurable and is marked by past, present, and future. How many hours did you exercise last week? How many hours did you spend on screen last week? It's measurable. In a time efficient society, we are asked to use our limited time efficiently, especially, for productivity or pleasure. However, the Judeo-Christian understanding of time cannot be reduced to chronological time. A unique Christian understanding of time is that time does not merely flow, but it has a direction. Time is a sequential and purposeful element in the unfolding of cosmic salvation history. In the Genesis story, God created light on the first day, On the second day, God created sky. On the third day,

earth and so on. On sixth day, God created living creatures and humans. The Bible said, "On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done." The Genesis story reflects a progression of time within the context of the creative acts of God. It moves from the beginning to the fulfillment of God's plan. In a larger timeframe, time moves toward a cosmic consummation. For Christian, time is not a mere resource to consume for our quick pleasure. Time is more like God's present for us to join God's movement in the unfolding history.

Think of dance. How many of you like dancing? Not me. God gave me two left feet. Imagine it is time to dance a slow waltz with your partner. The fact that you can dance very fast does not make you a good dancer. Even if you do an excellent B-boying movement, that does not make you a good dancer, because you are dancing a slow waltz with your partner. You need to follow the rhythm, the music, and the movements of your partner. We need to follow the lead of God's movement and direction. That's what make our time worthy. God doesn't want us to dance fast. It even took seven days for God to complete the world. God wants to dance with us slowly so that we can fully enjoy the present. Let me read a poem, "Slow Dance" written by David L. Weatherford.

Have you ever watched kids on a merry-go-round,
or listened to rain slapping the ground?

Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight,
or gazed at the sun fading into the night?

You better slow down, don't dance so fast,
time is short, the music won't last.

Do you run through each day on the fly,
when you ask "How are you?", do you hear the reply?

When the day is done, do you lie in your bed,
with the next hundred chores running through your head?

You better slow down, don't dance so fast,
time is short, the music won't last.

Ever told your child, we'll do it tomorrow,
and in your haste, not see his sorrow?

Ever lost touch, let a friendship die,
'cause you never had time to call and say hi?

You better slow down, don't dance so fast,
time is short, the music won't last.

When you run so fast to get somewhere,
you miss half the fun of getting there.

When you worry and hurry through your day,
it's like an unopened gift thrown away.

Life isn't a race, so take it slower,
hear the music before your song is over.

It's beautiful pome. Isn't it? When we slow down, we can find many gifts in our ordinary lives. Even without a dopamine spike, we can have enjoyment in this moment. "You better slow down, don't dance so fast, time is short, the music won't last."

All is Vanity

To help us decelerate from the fast pace of our lives, we first need to discover that what the world claims is worth dying for, may not be so. Fred Craddock, a great preacher and preaching professor, tells a story of a Greyhound he once talked with. One day, he visited his former student's house and after a great dinner, he was left alone in the living room with a large, friendly greyhound. He knelt down and started petting the dog and asked, "How are you doing, Mr. Greyhound?" and greyhound turned and looked up at him and said, 'I'm doing great; thank you very much. Thanks for asking.' And they started to have a conversation. The preacher said, "I understand that you used to be a racing greyhound."

The dog said, "Yes, I was. But I quit."

Fred said, "You quit? Why in the world did you quit? Did you quit because they didn't treat you well?"

The dog said, "Oh, no, they treated me wonderfully. They gave me the best care. They brushed me every day. They fed me the best food. It was great. But I quit."

"Did you quit because you didn't like racing?" asked the preacher.

"Oh no," said the greyhound. "I loved the feel of the wind in my face."

"Well, why did you quit?" asked the preacher. "Was it because you never won a race?"

"Oh no," said the greyhound. "I won race after race. I won lots of trophies and lots of money for my owner."

"Well, then, why did you quit?" asked the preacher.

The dog said, "If you really want to know...one day I was running as fast as I could. I was running faster than I had ever run in my life and I caught up with the rabbit and I discovered that it wasn't even a real rabbit! All of my life I had been running round and round in circles, trying to catch something that wasn't even real. So I quit!" A wise dog... right?

This story has a certain wisdom to it. Maybe this is the wisdom the author of Ecclesiastes taught us. Ecclesiastes begins with somewhat skeptical words. "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?" It continues to say that wisdom is vanity, pleasure is vanity, money, power, and all human toils under the sun are worthless. In other words, King Solomon is saying, "stop chasing worthless things that will vanish like mist." Rather, he said, "I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 8:15) Does Solomon sound like he's promoting dopamine farming? No. He encourages people to fully live the present moment because that's all we can do. The present is the only time we can truly enjoy. Some say, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present." We cannot change yesterday nor control tomorrow, so stop worrying

about things you can't change, accept God's gift with grateful hearts and live in the present. In 2024, don't dance so fast but dance slowly. Seize the moment and dance slowly with God. Amen.