

EXCERPT

IVP Books

Carpe Diem Redeemed *Seizing the Day, Discerning the Times*

September 24, 2019 | \$20, 176 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4581-1

How do we make the most of life and the time we have? In the midst of our harried modern world, Os Guinness calls us to consequential living, reorienting our notion of history not as cyclical nor as meaningless, but as linear and purposeful. We can seek to serve God's purpose for our generation, read the times, and discern our call for this moment in history.

Os Guinness, Seizing the Day, Discerning the Times

Karl Marx famously described workers in the Industrial Revolution as “wage slaves,” and quite apart from the thought of death at the end of life, many of us in our advanced modern world know well that we are time slaves. Life in the instant world of advanced modernity is fired at us point blank. And since we are encouraged to realize that life will speed up further as things are made even more “efficient,” does it mean that we are living too slowly and inefficiently now? We have less control over our time than ever, which is the real index of slavery. We are under the gun as never before—running, running, and never catching up. (Most of us, we are told, are “triple screen-gazers” and check our smartphones more than one hundred times a day, which is only one aspect of our constant state of partial attention and always feeling behind.)

Yet for all our frustrations and complaints about the “rat race,” we often do not give much thought to all that lies behind it and how we can begin to counter it. Which means we are all the more vulnerable to the efficiency experts and to new fashions that turn out to be false answers, and to some that make the problem even worse. And there is always the thought that we do not want to admit: if our own technologies have made us into time slaves, we have done it to ourselves.

Roman Krznaric's best-selling *Carpe Diem Regained* captures the modern dilemma superbly, and my own title is a deliberate variation on his. He has set out to explore the present status of the famous two-word maxim *carpe diem*, “seize the day,” from the Roman poet Horace's celebrated Ode 11. As Krznaric sees it, the motto has never been more popular, and it is now interpreted variously as a matter of five main approaches to time: grasping an opportunity, going for pleasure, practicing presence, developing spontaneity, and pursuing a certain style of politics.

Krznaric argues that the passionate desire to not miss out on life has been pulled off course by a welter of current distortions and look-alikes. Seizing the day, making the most of the moment and living each moment to the fullest has been hijacked and redirected to such false ends as consumerism, hedonism, workaholicism, mindfulness, and irresponsibility. Nike's “Just do it,” he says, has morphed into “Just buy it,” “Just plan it,” and “Just watch it.” Krznaric's book is a fascinating tour of the contemporary horizon concerning responses to time in the modern world. It shines a searching light on all sorts of current follies and pitfalls in handling time and therefore on the challenge of living a “good life” and an “examined life” today. Yet with the selective attention typical of so many of today's thinkers, his own answer overlooks the perspective of the most radical view of time that once shaped the Western world and that shines out today like a lighthouse in the storm that is advanced modern life—the unique perspective of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. He admits that his omission is deliberate and his short-sightedness is self-induced. “I don't believe there is any ultimate meaning of life, whether written in scripture, the stars or our DNA. If it meaning we seek, we can—and must—create it for ourselves.”

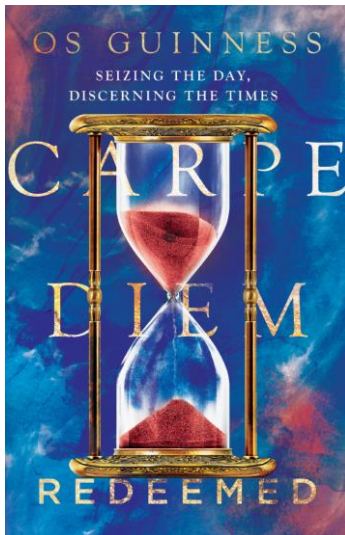


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Create it for ourselves? Like Bertrand Russell, with the great English philosopher's view of the Greek giant Atlas who carried his own world on his own shoulders, Krznic does not believe there is any meaning of life that is "inherent" in the universe or "out there," to be discovered. If anyone desires meaning today, they will have to create it by themselves and carry it by themselves. Nothing else is conceivable. By definition, the atheists' or agnostics' search for the meaning of time and life can never amount to more than a Do-it-Yourself endeavor.

The truth is that the DIY secularist view of time is a major and widely regarded answer, but it is only one answer among the world's many answers, and a minority answer at that. Yet when it comes to a challenge as profound as time, all answers should be considered and none should merely be asserted as if self-evident or taken on trust simply because the speaker is an eminent philosopher or a bestselling author. As always, contrast is the mother of clarity, and the differences between the answers make a difference—and make a difference not only for individuals but for whole societies and civilizations.

This book sets out the contours of the very different answer that Krznic overlooks—the Bible's. Unfortunately, this Jewish and Christian perspective came to be blindly accepted in the West with too few questions asked, and it is now blindly rejected in the West with too few questions asked. Over against the earlier attitude, I am not asking for any special treatment, and over against the current attitude, all I would seek is a fair hearing for a view that is distinctive, radical, and magnificently consequential for each of us as individuals as well as for the future of humanity. For surely it is undeniable that a wise understanding and a positive response to time and history is as vital to the future of humanity as it is to each one of us in our daily lives.

Carpe diem, "seize the day," or make the most of life, is a magnificent ideal, but how are we to achieve it? How are we to make it more than a slogan and a cliché fit only for a college student's poster? My argument here is simple, straightforward, and a sure way forward. Seizing the day and making the most of life must not be flaunted in the face of impossibility or absurdity; the ideal requires a vision of life capable of fulfilling it. And that, I will argue, can best be found within a faith, a relationship, and a way of life that does justice to the deepest meaning of time, of history, and human significance and enterprise.

In short, seizing the day, making the most of life, and understanding the meaning of life are inseparable. All three require that if we are to master time, we must come to know the author of time and the meaning of time and come to know the part he calls us to play in his grand story, which makes the deepest overall sense of time and history. And more, wonder of wonders, we are then invited to live lives that align our individual hopes and destinies with the very purpose and destiny of the universe itself.

—Adapted from the introduction, "You Only Live Once—If Then"



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Os Guinness, Scholar and Prominent Social Critic

Os Guinness (DPhil, Oxford) is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including

- *Impossible People*
- *Fool's Talk*
- *Renaissance*
- *The Global Public Square*
- *A Free People's Suicide*
- *Unspeakable*
- *The Call*
- *Time for Truth*
- *The Case for Civility*
- *Last Call for Liberty* and others

A frequent speaker and prominent social critic, he has addressed audiences worldwide from the British House of Commons to the US Congress to the St. Petersburg Parliament. He is a senior fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and was the founder of the Trinity Forum.

Born in China to missionary parents, he is the great-great-great-grandson of Arthur Guinness, the Dublin brewer. After witnessing the climax of the Chinese revolution in 1949, he was expelled with many other foreigners in 1951 and returned to England where he was educated and served as a freelance reporter with the BBC. Since coming to the US in 1984, he has been a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. He was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter, celebrating the First Amendment, and has also been senior fellow at the EastWest Institute in New York, where he drafted the Charter for Religious Freedom. He also coauthored the public school curriculum *Living with Our Deepest Differences*.

Guinness has had a lifelong passion to make sense of our extraordinary modern world and to stand between the worlds of scholarship and ordinary life, helping each to understand the other—particularly when advanced modern life touches on the profound issues of faith. He lives with his wife, Jenny, in McLean, Virginia, near Washington, DC.

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