

Introduction

I'd like to show you what I think is a creative clock (power point). Notice that each hour is designated by the appropriate number of flies: one fly for hour "1", two flies for hour "2", and so on through hour "12." The creativity of this clock is found in the play on words and the truth it implies. Time flies – and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Life Is Fleeting

Let me explain the general message of our text. In verses 1-2, David writes that he wanted to say something to God but restrained himself from saying it. The first two lines in verse 3 reveal why he did. He felt so strongly about what he wanted to say that it might be taken for disloyalty to God if he said it. But according to the last line in verse 3, he could no longer contain himself and so he said it. What he said, recorded in verses 4-6, was essentially this. Man is far too fleeting a creature for God to discipline him as persistently as He does.

Now that we know the general message of our text, let's descend into the details of verses 4-6 and what they reveal about us.

Their subject is what David calls "**the extent of my days**" in verse 4. It's what we call "**the dash**," the time between our birth and death. It's our one lifetime on earth in other words. Notice how David describes this lifetime in verses 4 and 5: "**transient**," "**handbreadths**," "**nothing**," and "**a mere breath**." His point is simple and clear. Our lifetime on earth is fleeting or short.

We recognize that when we do what David did in verse 5b. The phrase "**in Your sight**" shows that he's viewing the length of a normal human lifetime as God views it. Moses does the same in Psalm 90:3-6, fleshing it out with a detail. 1000 years is as a day to God. The normal lifetime of a male, according to S.S. actuarial tables, is 76 years. Men, if 1000 years is as a day to God, how much time is our 76 years to Him? I figured it out. It's 109.44 minutes, less than 2 hours. In the context of

God and eternity, our lifetime on earth is fleeting or short.

And according to David in verse 4, we need to internalize that it is. Notice what he asks God to assist him in doing. It's to **"know my end the extent of my days . . . how transient I am."** God wants us to grasp the fleeting nature of our lifetime on earth, in other words, and to act consistently with it. So, let's do just that.

Time Flies

We begin by identifying what that fleeting nature implies. It's that **"Time flies."** It may not seem like it sometimes because we do experience time subjectively. I like the way Chuck Swindoll says it, **"Some folks can stay longer in an hour than others in a week."** Or consider how deadlines seem to arrive so quickly but habits seem to take so long to break. We do experience time subjectively. But ultimately, every second is one billion nanoseconds, every minute is 60 seconds, and every hour is 60 minutes. Time is objective and it flies.

That it flies means that it **"keeps on slippin', slippin', slippin' into the future"** as the **"Fly Like an Eagle"** song says it. It marches on no matter what we do. A.W. Tozer said it as well as it can be said: **"Time is a resource that is nonrenewable and nontransferable. You cannot store it, slow it up, hold it up, divide it up or give it up. You can't hoard it up or save it up for a rainy day – when it's lost it's unrecoverable. When you kill time, remember that it has no resurrection."** He was absolutely right. Time flies and there's nothing we can do to stop it, reverse it, slow it down, or speed it up.

Invest Time Wisely

But there is something we can do. Use it wisely. That's the thrust of verse 6. Shakespeare may have had this verse in mind when he wrote in *Macbeth*: **"Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more."** That's a metaphorical description of how most

people live their lifetime on earth and a good commentary on verse 6. David notes the pointless and uproarious manner in which they live it. An article in USA Today claims that if most people added together all of the things they wanted to do, they'd need 42 hours a day to do it. They're kindred spirits in that regard with the people in verse 6.

The problem is that we can't make more time. There is something we can do though. Use the time we have wisely and that's the implied call of verse 6. Use it wisely. Acclaimed American theologian and preacher Jonathon Edwards explained what that means: **"Time is so short, and the work which we have to do in it is so great, that we have none of it to spare. The work which we have to do for eternity must be done in time, or it can never be done."** That is a vital insight. To use our time wisely means to do in it what needs to be done that prepares us for eternity – that makes us a person at home in heaven. Using it wisely that way requires two things of us.

Treasure Time

One is that we treasure time.

Let me make an observation. In our cultural context, we've become so accustomed to talking about time as a problem, as a source of pressure, we've lost sight of what it really is – a gift. Think of it this way. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is mystery. Today is a gift, which, as one author states tongue in cheek, is why we call it the **"present."** There's an old saying, **"Time is money,"** but that isn't so in this sense. Time is more valuable than money is.

That's because, as we learned in verses 4 and 5, there's so little of it. It's a fact of our existence. What is plentiful, we value lightly. What is scarce, we value highly. You know the expression **"killing time."** It presumes something. Time is plentiful. Most people think that, and trivialize it because they do. But it isn't plentiful. It's scarce instead, which we realize if we give it some thought.

So, let's do that – give it some thought. Luke Ward, who is called

the Fact Wizard, claims the following for an average person with a 79.5 year lifetime, which is 954 months. We spend one-third of our lives sleeping, 318 months, which leaves 636 months to live; 43 months in education, which leaves 593 months; 128 months at work, which leaves 465 months; 13 months in the bathroom, which leaves 452 months; 72 months eating, which leaves 380 months; 60 months waiting in lines or at traffic lights, which leaves 320 months; 48 months doing housework, which leaves 272 months; and 12 months looking for lost items, which leaves 260 months. 260 months is 21 years and 8 months. That's how much time we have to work with, which, believe me, isn't much.

My simple point is the time we have on earth isn't plentiful. It's scarce. It isn't something of which we have a lot. It's something of which we have a little. So, we should treasure it. Queen Elizabeth I, who was so wealthy she had 10,000 dresses in her wardrobe, was purported to have said on her deathbed, "**All my possessions for a moment of time.**" Whether she did or didn't say it, the moral is a good one. We should treasure time.

Manage Ourselves

Using time wisely requires a second thing of us. The first is to treasure *it*. The second is to manage *ourselves*.

Notice I didn't say, "**manage time.**" There is a whole field of study called "**time management**" and it's a hot topic today. Google "**time management**" and you'll see what I mean. In almost every business in America, consultants are hired to teach busy executives how to better manage their time.

But the truth is, no one has the ability to do that. Stephen Covey explains it well in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. We desperately need to grasp this: "**Time management is a misleading concept. You can't really manage time. You can't delay it, speed it up, save it, or lose it. No matter what you do time keeps moving forward at the same rate. The challenge is not to**

manage time, but to manage ourselves.” That’s exactly right. We can’t manage time, but we can manage ourselves and must.

To manage ourselves means to direct ourselves with discipline to a specific aim. That aim is to do the *right* things in the time we have – not to do *more* things but the *right* things. The right things are the most important things.

An object lesson illustrates what I mean. A consultant was teaching a seminar for executives. He placed a large, clear, and open-mouthed jar in front of the group and put seven big rocks in it. **“Is the jar full?”** He asked. Everyone nodded that it was. He then took small pebbles and filled up the jar with them in the spaces between the rocks. **“Is the jar full?”** He asked. Some nodded that it was. Next, he took fine sand and filled up the jar with it in the spaces between the pebbles. **“Is the jar full?”** He asked. No one answered. Finally, he took a pitcher of water and filled up the jar with it in the spaces between the grains of sand. **“What’s the lesson about time management?”** He then asked. Hands shot up and everyone agreed, **“No matter how busy you are, you can always fit more things into your schedule.”** **“Wrong,”** he replied: **“The lesson is – unless you put the big rocks in first, they’ll never fit in. You must figure out what the big rocks are for you.”**

That object lesson is right on point. The big rocks represent the most important things in life. We should put them into our schedules first and the less important things second, third, and fourth, and so on in descending order of importance. They’ll never fit in if we don’t.

You can see it here. We aren’t managing time. We’re managing ourselves. We’re directing ourselves with discipline, not to do more things in the time we have but the right things.

Managing ourselves is a two-step process. First, we identify the most important things in life. The most important things are those that need to be done, first of all, to prepare us for eternity and, second of all, to sustain our existence on earth. Relying on Scripture, people in the know, our own life experience, and good reasoning, we determine what

those things, specifically, are. They're the rocks. Anything else, no matter how important it may seem, is pebbles, sand, or water. Second, once we've identified the most important things, we take the time for them. We take the time for the most important things and find the time, if there's any left over, for the less important things. If we don't *have* the time for the most important things, we *take* it.

So that's how we manage ourselves. We identify the most important things in life and take the time for them.

A young associate I knew at Akron's largest law firm, billing a minimum of 54 hours a week, didn't have time for his wife and children. So, he took it. He left the firm, started his own practice, and spent the time with them he needed to spend.

Or another attorney I knew didn't have enough time for engaging God – for practicing solitude and silence, study, prayer, and private worship. So, he took it. He closed his office door during lunch hour, saw no clients, took no calls, and spent the time with God he needed to spend.

Those two attorneys managed themselves. We should do the same.

Conclusion

An anonymous poem expresses, in closing, the urgency of doing so: **"Just a tiny little minute, just a tiny little minute only sixty seconds in it. * Forced upon me, can't refuse it, didn't seek it, didn't choose it, but it's up to me to use it, give account of it if I abuse it. * Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it."** You and I have approximately 40 million minutes to live on earth. Let's begin right now to use those minutes wisely. Why? It's because they fly.

