

“30 Minutes Left to Live...”

According to a news report, a certain private school in Washington was faced with a unique problem. A number of girls were starting to use lipstick and would put it on in the bathroom. That was fine, but after they put on their lipstick they would press their lips to the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints.

Every night, the maintenance man would go in and clean them off the mirrors and the next day, the girls would put them back. Finally the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the maintenance man. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every night. To demonstrate how difficult it had been to clean the mirrors, she asked the maintenance man to show the girls how much effort was required. He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it in the toilet, and cleaned the mirror with it. Since then, there have been no lip prints on the mirror.

Sometimes it helps to see a bigger picture, doesn't it?! Today, Memorial Sunday, my goal is to help all of us see things from an ever bigger picture.

Today and tomorrow we remember. Memorial Day started as a day to commemorate soldiers who were killed in the Civil War. After WWI it became a day to honor Americans who died fighting in any war. Gradually it's become a day for honoring all those we love who have died. As we think about those who have given their lives to country and family, as we remember them, this is also a day to remember that our lives on this earth will one day end and somebody will be remembering us. Today we are doing the remembering; someday we'll be the ones being remembered. With that in mind this is a good time to pause and remember who we are and, more importantly whose we are, and what we can do with what's left of our one and only lives.

Now, I'm going to make several assumptions as I begin this message today. And it's very important that you hear what I'm about to say. All of these assumptions are false. I'm about to make several assumptions and to one degree or another, they're all false. But it's important that you play along for the next few minutes. The first assumption is that you want to hear everything I have to say. I'm just going to assume that! You may want to be here today, you may want to be somewhere else, I don't know. But that's where my first assumption fits so nicely!

The second assumption is that I only have 30 minutes left to live. My clock is ticking. My end is near. I've got 30 minutes left. Assuming that, this is the last stuff I'll ever say! So I want to tell you the stuff that is the most important. No time for fluff. This is the good stuff.

And the third assumption is that what I say to you today will be etched on your brains permanently. That it will have an impact on the rest of your lives in profound ways. As you move through life you will recall these 30 minutes. You won't recall me, I'm not important. But what I'm about to tell you is.

Assuming these three things, this is what I would say to you today.

First of all life is too short to play it safe. **[SLIDE: “Life is too short to play it safe.”]** I would say that quiet possibly the most debilitating and dangerous thing you will ever encounter in your lives is not what you'd expect. It's not a deadly disease, not a terrorist attack, not a rampaging student on a campus. No, the most dangerous thing you will ever encounter is this **[PICTURE: Easy Chair]**. This is an easy chair. It is the icon of comfort in our culture. The easy chair calls to you, doesn't it? If it doesn't it will soon. It calls to you and says, “Hey, come on over here. Sit down, get comfortable. You deserve some comfort. Relax. Slow down. What's your hurry?” The gravitational pull of the easy chair, and the screen that it's always pointed at, is huge. It's dangerous.

What's dangerous about the chair is not the stuff you do while you're in it. I think it's the stuff you don't do. It's the relationships that you never deepen. It's the people in need that you never serve because you don't even see them. It's the great, urgent prayers you never pray. It's the noble thought that you never think. It's the races that you never run, the battles you were made to fight that you never fight, the laughter you don't

laugh, the tears that you never cry. It's the great adventure of life with God that you were made for that you never go on. Because you're in the easy chair!

I want to tell you, you were made for something more than just life in the chair. You were made to do something more with your life than to try to arrange it to maximize the comfort and security and safety with which you live. You were made to spend your life in a risky partnership with God. This chair might be the most debilitating dangerous object you will encounter in your life. Not because of what happens when you're in it, but because of what doesn't happen.

Now when I say that life is too short to play it safe all the time, it's real important you understand I am not talking about going out and doing something stupid or impulsive or reckless. It's not about driving crazy, or not wearing your seatbelt. If you're a young male, this is not about reenacting scenes from the movie *Jackass*. It doesn't mean that you should never rest. It's not a call to exhaustion. It's really about making your ordinary life an adventuresome partnership with God. It's waking up in the morning and saying, "God, what do you have for me to do today? I'll do it." Even when it's scary, and the outcome is unknown, and sacrifices have to be made along the way, At least it's not the easy chair!

You see, so many people are afraid of failure. And that fear keeps them from taking any risks. That's life in the easy chair. You may have heard me say that one of my personal mottos, and mottos of this church, is this, "Fail forward." If I'm going to fail in life, it's because I did something, not nothing. I want to get to the end of my life, here in 25 minutes, and say, "Man I've had some serious failures, but at least I did something!" Listen, your failures will be the best fertilizer for your future successes. Your failures will be the fertilizer of the success of future generations. Don't fail by doing nothing. Do something!

You see, the great things that have happened on this earth, the great things that are happening on this earth, the great things that will happen, the great things that are waiting to be discovered, will happen through people who see life as an adventure with the God who made them. If your life becomes a constant quest for comfort, guess what, you're already dead, it's just that nobody's made it official yet. Life's too short to play it safe.

Life is also too short to hold a grudge. **[SLIDE: "Life is too short to hold a grudge."]** You will be hurt in this life. People will hurt you--most of the time unintentionally, but sometimes intentionally. There is nothing you can do to stop that. But what you can do is develop within you the quick-release ability, when it comes to grudges. The alternative is not good. Because if you hold a grudge it tends to grow. That's bad enough, but then as you go through life you'll inevitably add more grudges, and more, and more, and pretty soon those grudges are weighing you down and poisoning your life, your relationships, your future, your soul. Don't ever forget that letting go of grudges, forgiving others, opens the flow of God's forgiveness for you.

Matthew records Jesus saying, **[SLIDE...]** **"...if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15, NRSV).** I think those are some of the scariest words in the Bible.

Life is too short to carry a grudge. Put your energy somewhere else. Put your life-energy into big dreams, great relationships, world problems that need to be fixed, difficult people that still need to be loved, books that need to be written and read, thoughts that need to be thought (make a up a few words along the way!). Don't waste your time and energy in grudges. Life's too short to carry a grudge.

My time is ticking away. One other thing I'd tell you in my last few minutes to live is, **[SLIDE: "Embrace opposite tensions"]** embrace opposite tensions. I've found that it's often within the opposite tensions that you find the mystery, the truth. Often that is exactly where God is, in between the tensions. Live within those tensions. What am I talking about? Be strong and gentle. Be wise and humble. Be faithful and merciful. Be focused and flexible. See the big picture, and care about the details. Keep old traditions and think new thoughts. Grow up and always stay childlike.

Jesus said, **[SLIDE...]** **"...be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16, NIV).** I believe that it is in the midst of tensions like these that we encounter the living God and that we live out lives of truth. Take the, in Latin it would be called the *via media*, the middle path between the tensions.

Moving on, my time ticks away... In my last 30 minutes on earth I would tell you, as you move into your future, **[SLIDE: “Take regular intervals to brutally identify your illusions”]** take regular intervals to brutally identify your illusions and deal with them. What am I talking about here? Common illusions like what brings joy in life. You’ll have to face this illusion often, because this world wants you to believe that stuff, gadgets, cars, houses, money will bring you joy. That is an illusion. Ask anybody who’s had all that stuff and then faced a debilitating illness, they’ll tell you. Ask anybody who’s had all that and had a child die, they’ll tell you. Those are the times when you see that none of that stuff really matters. Trying to find joy in stuff is an illusion. Jesus said, **[SLIDE...] “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36, NIV)**. As you move into the next phase in your lives, you’d better nail this one. Real joy comes through relationships...with God and others.

Here’s another illusion: **[SLIDE: “Take regular intervals to brutally identify your illusions”]**. Thinking that there are some people who are better than you and some people who are worse than you. By that I mean seeing some people as more valuable and others as less valuable. This is an illusion. In the New Testament book of Romans the Apostle Paul wrote, **[SLIDE...] “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and [all] are justified freely by his grace through...Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-24, NIV)**.

If you look at people who are different from you and place a value on them as greater or lesser than you, know that you are living in a dangerous illusion. Because you have never laid eyes on someone that Jesus didn’t die for. Jesus didn’t value people on some worldly standard. Maybe that’s why he spent time with people labeled as saints **and** as sinners. He spent time with those who were held in high esteem, and those who were outcasts. He spent time with the religious leaders and wealthy people, and he spent time with lepers, hookers, and thieves. And he didn’t care what people thought about him doing it. He only saw people in two categories, lost and found and he loved them both.

I once read somewhere that you can tell a lot about a person’s character when you see them around the very young and the very old. What would I see in you?

A prayer I pray almost every day for myself and you is this, “God, help me to see people the way you see them and love people the way you love them.” To see them any other way is an illusion.

Time is ticking away. Are you still listening? In my last moments of life I would tell you to **[SLIDE: “Find your holy discontent”]** find your holy discontent. What is it that you look out into the world and see that ignites something in you? What is it that you can’t stand when you see it happen in this world? What is it that wrecks you? Is it the genocide in Darfur? Racial injustice in our country? Corporate misconduct? Teenage pregnancy? Environmental destruction? Homelessness? Poverty? What wrecks you? Whatever that is often creates the tension, the emotion, the internal firestorm inside of you that creates the capacity for action. It’s the point where God speaks to you and launches you in a direction that answers the question of, “So God, what do you want me to do, be, become?”

You better know what wrecks your heart because it’s probably wrecking God’s heart too, and he’s probably looking for someone who’s getting wrecked just like he is. Don’t give in to the temptation to numb that discontent. Don’t numb that inner turmoil—a few more hours of TV, a few more drinks, more stuff to occupy more life and mind. That’s what we love to do in our culture when we feel discontent, let’s just numb that internal pain and do nothing. Don’t go that route! Press in to your discontent. Get closer to your discontent! Fuel your discontent!

And I don’t care how capable you are, how smart you are, how thin you are, how educated you are. How old you are. How young you are. Those things don’t matter. God is just looking for people who get wrecked about the things he gets wrecked about, then he wants to sign you up and give you a vision that will get you on the solution side of something. And will get you motivated for a very long time.

My time is ticking away! One other thing I would tell you, the best stuff, if you truly want to be happy, and joyful, and make an impact, and find significance, the most important things is this; **[SLIDE: “Be a servant”]** be a servant. You see, if you’ve chosen to follow Christ, then in some capacity you’ve chosen to

lead. You've chosen to be a role model. Please know this: the best way to lead is to serve; to put others before yourself. This is the true way to joy in life. It's what Jesus modeled. It's the final message he left his friends right before his death. He got together for a dinner party with his best friends. They ate a traditional Seder meal. Then he did what the household servants would normally do. He took a basin of water, and a towel, and the God of the universe in human form, got down on his knees and washed the dust and dirt off the feet of his friends! That's the final message he wanted them to get; the final impression he wanted to make on them. If you want to be great, be the servant of all. And that wasn't some self-deprecating act of, "Oh-look-me, humble and meek, washing dirty feet." No. He really was saying, "I want you to be great, I want you to live lives of significance. I want you to live lives of impact, and this is how you do it: By serving others."

If there is one choice you make that will change you and empower you for the rest of your life, however long that life may be, it is the choice to be a servant to all.

To be a servant is to move the focus off you and onto others. You can see the basic nature of human beings by watching two-year-olds in action. You can sum up their character in two words: "Me first!" That's kind of cute in a two-year-old, but it's pretty ugly in a fifty-year-old. I see way too many adults wallowing in me (and sometimes I go there myself). "My needs, my wants, my desires, my issues, my inner child—me, me, me!" These are some of the most unhappy people you will ever know. You see, it's when we break out of "me" and extend ourselves for others and meet their legitimate needs that our deepest needs will be met too. The example of the God of the universe in Jesus Christ was one of servant leadership.

I'll put this bluntly, the choice is yours. You can choose to be stuck in the "me first" mode. But if that's what you choose, please don't get married and have someone entrust his or her life to you. Please do not choose to have children if you're into the "me first" mindset. Please do not choose to be a leader. Please don't make employees spend 50 percent of their waking hours working for someone with a "me first" agenda. Don't do it!

You have the potential to be truly great. If you want to be great, then be a real servant.

I'm about to die. This is my dying story. The great teacher Dr. Alexander Papaderos had just finished teaching a seminar and after it was over, professor Papaderos asked if there were any final questions. Sure enough, a guy in the back of the room held up his hand and said jokingly, "Yes, Dr. Papaderos, I have a question. What is the meaning of life?"

Everybody in the class laughed. They all knew it was an impossible question and the guy who asked it was just joking in a good-hearted way. But Dr. Papaderos just smiled. He looked at the student and said, "I will answer your question." And then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small mirror, about the size of a quarter. He said, "When I was a small child during World War II, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place...I kept the largest piece, this one, and by scratching it on a stone I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect sun light into the darkest places...It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

"I kept that little mirror, and as I went about growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, though, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game, but a metaphor of what I could do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light, but the light--truth, understanding, knowledge--is there and it will shine into the dark places if I reflect it. With what I reflect into the dark places of this world, into the dark places of human hearts, I can change some things in some people. Perhaps others seeing it happen will do likewise. That is what I am all about. This is the meaning of my life."

You are not the light. But you can choose to reflect the light of God in Jesus Christ. Reflect the light of truth, and knowledge, and understanding. Choose carefully what you give your life to. I would challenge you to give your life to something bigger than yourself. To be more specific, give your life to someone bigger than yourself, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." I'm not a Christian because it makes my life easy, or gives me all the answers. I'm a Christ-follower because this life of faith is the big adventure! I've been given new life by choosing to follow Christ and now I want to give my life away. I want to see this world changed: AIDS

eradicated, hunger eliminated, hope promulgated, tyranny eviscerated, life elevated, joy “multiplicated.” I believe that happens when I follow Jesus Christ, the Light. You will give yourself, your life, to something. That is inevitable. Choose wisely. Reflect the light in the time you have left. As for me, my clock has expired.

Today and tomorrow, remember those you love but see no more, remember to reflect the light. And for today that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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