

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 11: Psalm 90

Teach Us to Number Our Days

Stay on the Path ~

The inscription above Psalm 90 indicates that it was written by Moses. It is the only psalm with this distinction, likely making it the oldest recorded psalm in Scripture. Composed more than fourteen hundred years before the coming of Christ, scholars believe it was written at some point during Israel's wilderness wanderings. What should have been a few weeks or months of travel from Egypt to the Promised Land turned into forty years of desert circles, until nearly all the generation that God had delivered died out in the wilderness.

Moses led a stiff-necked nation of God's people that, instead of obeying, insisted on rebelling against God time after time. In the midst of continuing disappointment and despair, Moses composed Psalm 90 as his prayer to God, keeping his focus on the eternal. The psalm itself transcends time, serving to remind Moses and everyone who followed, that what truly matters in life is not what is temporal but eternal, not what is visible to the eye but what is essential to the soul.

In today's world we are so tethered to our technology that we let time control us rather than the other way around. How on earth did Moses ever find his way through the wilderness without his GPS when leaving what was familiar to go out into the unknown? Would we, like the Israelites, be willing to leave all modern conveniences behind and learn to trust God for what we need? Could we disconnect ourselves from our I-Phones, computers, and time-pieces for a season in order to sense God's presence and listen for His voice? The Israelites didn't pass their test of obedience, though they were given multiple opportunities over forty years. If you would just imagine yourself in their sandals for a moment . . . as God looks down at your life, how would He say that *you* are doing?

Did you know ~

When mortality begins staring you in the face, the psalms offer a many-faceted picture of who God is and what He's done on your behalf. In these poems our ordinary earthly life takes on a heavenly perspective, as issues are played out with God at the center of it all. We learn that our raw human emotions are not only an essential part of this life, but that they matter to God as well. *Here is poetry which more than vies with that of Milton and Shakespeare, yet it is the poetry of downright reality; and, as "the body is more than raiment," so here, the reality is greater than the poetry which expresses it.* (J. Sidlow Baxter)

Psalm 90

The Eternity of God,
and Man's Frailty

A Prayer of Moses
the man of God

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling
place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were
brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth
and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting
You are God.

3 You turn man to destruction,
And say, "Return, O children of men."

4 For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night.

5 You carry them away like a flood;
They are like a sleep.
In the morning they are like grass
which grows up:

6 In the morning it flourishes and grow up;
In the evening it is cut down and withers.

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger,
And by Your wrath we are terrified.

8 You have set our iniquities before You,
Our secret sins in the light of
Your countenance.

9 For all our days have passed away in
Your wrath;
We finish our years like a sigh.

10 The days of our lives are seventy years;
And if by reason of strength they are
eighty years,

Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

11 Who knows the power of Your anger?
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.

12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Return, O Lord!
How long?
And have compassion on
Your servants.

14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,
 That we may rejoice and be glad
 all our days!
 15 Make us glad according to the days
 In which You have afflicted us,
 The years in which we have seen evil.
 16 Let Your work appear to Your servants,
 And Your glory to their children.
 17 And let the beauty of the Lord our
 God be upon us,
 And establish the work of our hands for us;
 Yes, establish the work of our hands.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 90.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 90? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

When contemplating the mounting instability of this life, we must be assured that God alone is our source of security and protection. People of all ages can find comfort by looking to Him in times of uncertainty. Ask the Lord to apply His comfort where you need it most today.

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) Psalm 90:12

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

Life is turbulent and transitory—people and situations come and go—but God is the one constant in the midst of it all.

I. God sovereignly preordains our days.

Throughout the forty years of wilderness wanderings, God's people had no place they could call home. These sojourners were constantly packing and unpacking their belongings to move on to the next rest stop. Moses found his rest in God, recording his thoughts in verse 1: *Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.* The word *Lord* is *adonay*, which literally means "master or lord." It is used some fifty-five times in the book of Psalms in reference to God's majesty. In other Old Testament passages, it speaks of *adonay* as the sovereign Lord who is the ultimate ruler and power over everything.

1. What does Moses ponder in verse 2 that defines God's majesty?
 - a. Moses spoke similar words when he pronounced his final blessing on God's people from Mt. Nebo just before he died. What familiar point does he make in Deuteronomy 33:27?

Moses believed in the permanence of God, that in a constantly changing world, from everlasting to everlasting, He is!

In stark contrast to the eternity of God, Moses compares the mortality of man in verses 3–6.

2. Looking from the perspective of God's eternity, the psalmist says a thousand years are equivalent to a twenty-four-hour day, which quickly passes (v. 4). What other illustrations does he use in verses 5–6?

Pause & ponder ~

The pronoun “our” is used in verse 1 when Moses declares, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” It identifies not only Moses but all of us as belonging to the household of faith. In other words, we are keeping company with the likes of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Moses and David, Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Mary and Martha. God sustained all of those who believed just as He will also sustain you. It is in Him that you live and move and have your being. What thoughts come to mind, knowing you are at home with these great saints of old?

II. We must value each day to gain a heart of wisdom.

While God's people walked through the wilderness for forty years, their sin provoked God's wrath, causing an entire generation to die without entering the Promised Land.

1. What does Moses explain about sin? vv. 7–8

Human life is shortened because it is spent under God's judgment of sin, our years finished *like a sigh* (v. 9). Even godly men and women have a limited time—some seventy, some eighty years, but the most we have to show for it is *labor* (hard work) and *sorrow* (disappointment) and then death. These are the thoughts that Moses pondered as he wrote from his heart.

The point Moses drives home here is that people do not take seriously the wrath of God or the intensity of his anger over sin. We do not understand the power of His anger, nor do we give Him the reverence He is due!

2. In verse 12, Moses expresses the remedy for our dilemma; what is it?

God has fashioned our days for us, numbered them and weighed them in value, and we must learn to do the same!

Touchpoint~

The best use of one's life is to spend it for something that will outlast it. If you aren't investing your time and energy in the kingdom of God, you should be. Find out what your spiritual gifts are and get going. If you will take the first step, God will do the rest through you as you walk by faith. Determine today not to let another day go by without doing something to make a difference for Him! Please record your thoughts below.

III. God restores and establishes us by His mercy.

Moses concludes the psalm with a prayer for God's mercy and compassion. God's people had gone a long time without realizing His blessing: *Return, O Lord! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.*

1. In your own words, state the rest of Moses' prayer below . . .
 - a. v. 14:
 - b. v. 15:
 - c. v. 16:
 - d. v. 17:

Moses interceded for God to intervene and stop the suffering of His people that was the result of their sin against Him. Because they had turned their backs on God, the correction was painful. Rather than be consumed by His wrath, Moses makes a heartfelt plea for the Lord to *establish the work of our hands*, making their efforts and their lives worthwhile.

This psalm is a passionate plea for God's people to live their lives each day with an eternal perspective and a desire to please Him. Each one of us has a span of days and years allotted to us, divinely determined by God. The message here is clear: use your time wisely! Make good choices. Invest yourself not only in this world but in the world to come.

Pause & ponder ~

Perspective is crucial to the Christian! Your perspective determines how you see, the choices you make, and the way you live your life. Learn to live in the light of eternity—view your life from God's perspective.

Time is the most valuable commodity we possess. Each of us has the same twenty-four hours in a day; what's important is how you spend them. Ephesians 5:15–21 contains the answer from a practical perspective on how to walk in wisdom. Read the passage and then finish the verses.

- v. 15: *See then that you walk circumspectly . . .*
- v. 16: *redeeming the time . . .*
- v. 17: *Therefore do not be unwise . . .*
- v. 18: *And do not be drunk with wine . . .*
- v. 19: *speaking to one another in . . .*
- v. 20: *giving thanks always . . .*
- v. 21: *submitting to one another . . .*
- Personal: Which of the above are you moved to take to heart today? Why?

Live the psalm ~

Perhaps *you* have been living in disappointment, discouragement, and despair. This psalm is intended to get you to *look up* and see things from God's perspective. Time is short, you must live with your eyes focused on the next world—not this one. Don't live for the applause of men but rather the approval of God. Doing so will allow you to live with an eternal perspective in view. How has this psalm influenced your take on life? Please share below.

Pray the psalm ~

Ask God to help you stop wasting your time and invest wisely in His kingdom, in the things that matter most for eternity. He will help you to see your circumstances as He sees them. "Oh Lord, teach me to number my days, that I may gain a heart of wisdom."
