

Renewing Your Mind for the New Year

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Bible Text: Psalm 90

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Someone asked me quite recently about my New Year's resolutions and I'm not a big one on New Year's resolutions, frankly, I really don't think like that. Sure, I would like to weigh a little less than I do and get more exercise than I do, but that isn't unique to the turn of the calendar. If we're going to mark the calendar at all, perhaps we should aim our thinking higher than those traditional ways of thinking about New Year's resolutions and thinking about our bodily existence and the things that accompany that. I understand why people look to that and that's fine as far as it goes, but what if we took the occasion on the turn of the calendar to actually think about life itself; to think in terms of spiritual realities and spiritual existence in a way that would actually frame and shape the way that we approach all of our existence, rather than simply thinking about physical health for a short period of time. What if we did that? What if we looked at the calendar and said, "Another year has gone by, another time is rolling along. What should I be thinking in those terms?" What if we took the opportunity to think like that? Where would it take us?

Well, Psalm 90 gives us direction and that text that I read just before Larry came up to lead us in singing, is a really crucial Psalm. It was written by Moses and most likely it was written toward the end of his life, toward the end of the 40 year wilderness wandering when the people of Israel were under the judgment of God. In Psalm 90, and just to give you a little bit of a ten cent overview of it, Moses meditates on the character of God and then he contrasts it with the mortality of man, and having reflected on God's eternal nature, vis-à-vis the mortality of man, he then turns to prayer and makes certain requests that God would bless the labor of his hands. That's a little bit of an overview. It starts out vertical, it goes horizontal, and then he turns to prayer. He thinks about God, then he thinks about life, and then that brings him to pray and what Moses does in this Psalm, is he helps us put life itself into perspective. He helps us think about the realities that shape all of life, and here is what I would say to you, beloved, is that what you see in Psalm 90 is definitive for the way to think rightly about all of life, and without these things, you cannot possibly have a correct view of life, a correct worldview at all, and yet with these things, all of a sudden, you are set in a place where you are able to have a perspective to think rightly about everything that would happen in the coming year, or anything that has happened to you in the past.

So this is a wonderful Psalm and we're going to bring four points out here tonight. How is it that you should think about life as you move into 2016? How is it that you should think

about life at any time, really? Well, first of all, and the first principle that we would say here this evening is this: is that you must embrace eternity. You must embrace eternity, and if you think about this in terms of the way that I opened it, thinking about New Year's resolutions and the fact that we all tend to think in kind of narrow ways and bodily existence and all of that, you see the sharp contrast with the way that Scripture would have us to think. Moses draws on the eternality of God as he begins this meditation, as he begins this prayer that is Psalm 90.

Look at verse 1 with me, he says, "Lord," so he addresses God as Adonai, he says,

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

Notice, that right from the start he goes to a lofty realm of thought. He goes and he thinks about and he addresses God from the perspective of God's eternal character. Speaking as the leader of the people of Israel at that time, he says, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place through all generations." God called Abraham out in rough terms about 2,000-2,100 years before the time of Christ; Moses is writing about 1,400 years before the time of Christ, and so in very general, rough terms, for 600-700 years, God had been the God of the people of Israel. He had been the God of Abraham and his descendents. And so Moses is writing here from a perspective of God's long centuries old dealings with his people, and he brings that out in verse 1.

He says, "Lord, you've been our dwelling place in all generations," and yet, he goes even further back than that. He says, "You've been our God for centuries," and yet in verse 2, he stretches back before time began and he says, "Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." He thinks about God from the sense that God is timeless. God never began because he had always been; he is absolutely eternal in his character. And so he goes back to the earliest point in earthly time, the creation of the world and the mountains on it, and he says, "God, you existed even before then."

Now, what does that say to us here today? Oh, I intend this to be a very pastoral time. I intend this to be for your edification and your encouragement. What does this say to you as you would think rightly about life itself? Well look, we all get wrapped up in our personal problems, the things that are going on in the world and just the routine of life and things going on day by day and we tend to be driven by what we see in front of us. What you have to see if you're going to live rightly, if you're going to have a right worldview, is that that is really a wrong way to think about life. You know, we have to do those things, but if we're going to think rightly about life, if we're going to set the cornerstone and square everything up with what reality truly is, we have to go back and see who it is that is the source of all existence, it is the eternal God. And that God is not bound by time like we are; he is not affected by the motions of what happens in the world like we are; he's not affected by the ups and downs as we are. He dwells outside of that. He dwells outside of history. God established his eternal purposes before time began and

we must understand that. We must have that at the cornerstone of the way that we think about life; that life originated with an eternal God who in his great infinite omniscience, determined where the course of history would go before the world began, and now in time, he is working out those purposes. God is above the vicissitudes of time. He is above the rolling waves of time and life and death and birth and the cycle of life. He is way about that. He is infinitely above that. And that is where you must start your thinking if you're going to think rightly about life going into the new year. You must embrace eternity, and what I mean by that, is that you must calculate God's eternal reality in the way that you think about life and what happens to you. After time ends, we will find that God has accomplished his purposes to perfection.

So, think about this, for some reason and I've mentioned this in the past, when I'm thinking about pre-eternal eternity before time began, it's always to my left and eternity future is always to my right. I don't know why that is but it helps me think spatially about it, I guess. But here's the way that you should think about life, here's the way that you should think about existence: God existed before time began. God determined the way that he wanted the course of events to go before the mountains ever existed. Now, as you step into time from that, here the meaning of time is that God is working out those purposes over the course of generations in order to bring it to the result that he intends to culminate in, eternity future. It is very transcendent, lofty thought, that Moses is laying out here for us.

So for you to understand life at all, is to realize that you are in a dot of time in a much larger perspective that is governed by the eternal God who is dwelling outside of time. That, God's eternal character, that, God's eternal purpose, that, God's sure outworking of that eternal purpose, is the ultimate context of your life. You live life, watch this, this is foundational and no one can understand life until this is anchored in their thinking: you live life in a context, in a realm, you live life in the realm of God achieving his eternal purposes, and that is what is always going on in time, God inexorably working out the eternal purposes which he established before time began. Look, I mean, that's the reality of history, and those who would define God out of existence, those who would ignore him, they can't possibly understand what life is about because this is what reality is.

Now, what is the implication of that for your earthly life today and as you look forward into 2016? What does that mean? How should you think about what happens to you? Good things, by earthly standards, blessings come to you, or tragedy strikes, or it's just a matter of routine and this year seems like last year, what should you think about that? Well, look over at Ecclesiastes 7:14, just to the right in your Bible beyond the book of Proverbs. If you get to Isaiah, you've gone too far. Ecclesiastes 7:14, we'll start in verse 13. Ecclesiastes 7:13, Scripture calls you to think in these terms. Scripture calls you to meditate on the transcendent reality of God and his purposes and to realize what that means for your life. Ecclesiastes 7:13 says, "Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent?" Who can change the purpose of God when he sets his hand to do it? Then in verse 14 it says, "In the day of prosperity be happy." Is 2016 going to bring you prosperity and blessing? Be happy, enjoy it. "But in the day of adversity consider that God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover

anything that will be after him." You must understand that whatever comes into your life in 2016 is going to be something that God has appointed for you in that, and that if everybody likes the prosperous times, everybody loves the good health and the blessings and everybody can rejoice and be happy in that, and Scripture says good for you if you realize that that's coming from the hand of God, be happy and take joy in it. But, and here is where a Christian worldview, a biblical worldview, starts to shape the way that you think and respond to life, when adversity hits, you must remember that God has appointed that for you as well. Job said in Job 2, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

So, in other words, you have to look past the outworking of your circumstances and embrace the eternal nature of God and the fact that he is working out eternal purposes. Sometimes that will be to the liking of your earthly desires. Sometimes it will be directly contrary to them. You must think about it from the perspective, "Whatever comes in 2016, blessing or adversity, this is what God has given me. This is what I must respond to. I must bow low in worship because I remember who he is. He's the eternal God outside of time who existed before the mountains were formed." It's kind of a mouthful, isn't it? It's a lot to take in. But, you know, it's not until you really start thinking along those terms that you are really starting to think rightly about life, and we all tend to be too superficial, we tend to be too carnal in our thinking, we tend to be too earthbound. Well, that's why we need Scripture to help us.

And let me just bring this out and kind of work out a little bit of pastoral implication to you here. I speak gently tonight to discouraged hearts; I speak gently and kindly to those of you who are weighed down. Are you entering into this new year with discouragement, maybe over chronic, long-term trials that seem to have no end, no resolution in sight? Does the new year bring trials to you? Well, beloved, let me encourage you to return to this perspective that we're talking about here tonight. The hand of God is in everything that happens. There is nothing that has happened in your life that God hasn't directed you to you this very point of your existence, and that can be pretty hard to swallow sometimes if you've bought into a sugar review of God that God just exists to manipulate circumstances to your liking. But those of you that are going through really hard trials, that view of God doesn't do much for you in the end, does it? What you need is something more substantial. What you need is to understand that the trials and the adversity that God has appointed for you has come from a wise, eternal plan that is outside of time and that God is wisely directing your life in order to accomplish his purposes. And when you think about it from that perspective, then all of a sudden you have a real foundation that you can stand on. You have a real anchor that can settle life for you and say, "Even though this is difficult, I realize that there is an eternal context to what's happening here far beyond my realm to be able to comprehend and see, but I can rest in this because I know who God is. I know that he is eternal, and his eternal purposes," watch this, "his eternal purposes are sure; they are certain; they are wise; they are good," and here's the part that you need to get across the bridge to, "and it is more important that his eternal purposes be accomplished than it is for me to have happy circumstances in my life. If God has appointed adverse circumstances to me for a time, I

accept that," you say to yourself. "I embrace that because I realize that his eternal purpose is at work and that is what I want to see advanced."

So in the day of adversity, consider that God has made that day for you just as he did the longer ago times, the days of your prosperity, and you can rest in that. You can anchor in that. And, you know, I realize that what we're saying here is just so contrary to what people that make you want to think that God just wants you to be healthy and happy. God wants everything to go well for you just like you want it to go, and God just has... Well, no. You know, some of the greatest things that have happened in the course of church history and of the people of God have come from people suffering and people being alone and people being isolated in the course of a difficult life. You know, what would we think about Christ on the cross crying out in dereliction saying, "God, why have you forsaken me?" Paul, saying at the end of his ministry, "Only Luke is with me," and speaking in the Corinthian epistles about what he knows as he describes the adversity and the beatings in the shipwrecks and the sleeplessness and the hunger and thirst that he went through. You cannot possibly reconcile the biblical reality of Christ and the greatest men of the faith with this superficial sugary view of God that is being taught so broadly and roundly. It can't be right, and it can't be reconciled to what the biblical testimony is.

Once you recognize that and you say, "Okay, that's true for me too," then what happens is that there is this powerful understanding, there is this force, almost, this spiritual force that overtakes your thinking, and you realize, "I don't have to be prosperous. I don't have to avoid adversity in my life because I'm just part of something bigger, the eternal purposes of God, and knowing that and belonging to that and recognizing and embracing it, that's what I want my life to be about anyway. So whether it's prosperity or adversity, either one is simply an expression of the eternal purpose of God and that's what I'm after." That's the way that you think, and that kind of thinking sets you well. It sets you to be able to look to the future with serenity, without fear of bad things happening. All of a sudden you can look forward and say, "Whatever happens is going to be a further outworking of the purposes of God, and if it's adversity, I'm going to bless God just the same if it's prosperity." It changes life.

Sometimes, I don't know if I should say this or not but I'm going to, there are times where I say things and I preach things simply because this is going to sound too self-centered and it's not like this, it's always for your up-building to the best of my ability. But many times at this stage in my life, I am preaching things that I wish I had heard when I was a young man; when I was 16 or 20 or 22; when I was going through some real adversity in my life and I didn't have this perspective. It would have transformed everything. If I had only known then what I know now from Scripture, I wouldn't have been so anxious and worried that somebody was going to break in and steal one of my kids, you know, when we were living in a crime infested area in Southern California. I wouldn't have been so worried about what was happening with my career, or when things turned against me in the places that I was at. You know, I needed this and I didn't have it in my heart. I just didn't know God that well. I didn't know Scripture in the way that being able to study over time has brought. So there is this sense that I know that you need this too because I needed it and didn't have it. I want you have it so that you can sink the roots of your life

in the soil of the sovereign goodness of God and stand like a man when adversity hits. That's what I want for you, to stand like a woman of God. That perspective comes when you know God deeply and you know God deeply when you see how Scripture describes him and that's what we're seeing here from Psalm 90.

So in the midst of your hardship, beloved, I would say, yes, it's hard. I realize that. It's very difficult for you and I sympathize with that, but what I want you to see from Scripture is that your God, your heavenly Father, your Lord Jesus Christ who laid his life down for you to secure your eternal redemption, that God that you belong to, is certainly working out his purposes in your life without fail, and because that is true, you can know that it will be good for you in the end, even if you can't see or understand how that would be true right now.

So knowing that God's in control changes everything. Knowing that he is eternal means that there can be no human opposition or circumstance that could raise up and counteract and stop his eternal purpose from being accomplished. How could we think anything else, you know? God is God. God is in control, not Satan, not adverse people in your life, not the hardship, God is. And those of you that know Christ, God is your heavenly Father. God is the Father of your Lord Jesus Christ. You know he's good, that's why he was on the cross, loving your soul at the sake of his own life. He can't possibly have anything other than the highest, noblest, holiest purposes for what he's doing in your life. So rest in that and trust him and obey him, and, yes, let's even say it this way, even to humble yourself under the hardship and trust him. To say, "Lord, I accept this because I believe that you're working out your eternal purpose." 1 Peter 5:10 says, that chapter says that God is opposed to the proud but he gives grace to the humble, and at the culmination of that, Peter says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

Do you know what it means to be a Christian? It means that God has called you so that you would share in his eternal glory forever. That is the purpose for which he saved you. He saved you so that you would be fit for his presence in all of eternity. He saved you so that you could become conformed to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; that you would be gathered around giving glory to him and receiving eternal blessing from him in a perfect realm of bliss that we can't begin to comprehend or speculate on how wonderful it's going to be. That's why God saved you. And Peter says, "He called you to his eternal glory in Christ."

Well, what if your adversity, your present adversity, was simply the training ground, the preparation that made you fit for that eternal glory? What if life was like that? What if that's what life was about? It is. What if God is simply using your hardship to shape you and perfect you for the glory that he has called you to receive, an inheritance that belongs to you and that is reserved in heaven for you, waiting for you to enter in just a little while from now? What if that were the reality of life? Well, that would change everything, wouldn't it? Wouldn't that change everything? That would just reorient your whole perspective of everything that happens to you. And if you embrace this eternal purpose of

God, if you embrace eternity in your thinking, then you're going to completely see life in 2016 differently than if you didn't.

So you must embrace eternity as you're thinking about the life to come in 2016, but as we move on in this text, there is a pointed contrast, a complementary perspective that you need as well, that's almost, it almost seems, almost directly contradictory, but it's not. Your second point for this evening, we said you must embrace eternity, secondly, you must embrace brevity. You must embrace brevity. As Moses goes on in his prayer in verses 3 through 6, he turns and contemplates the mortality of man, that life is brief, life is fleeting, life is like grass that flourishes for just a little while and then it withers and fades away. If you're going to think rightly about life in 2016, you need to calculate that into your perspective.

Look at verses 3 through 6 of Psalm 90. Moses, still praying here to God, he says,

3 You turn man back into dust And say, "Return, O children of men." 4
For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by,
Or as a watch in the night. 5 You have swept them away like a flood, they
fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. 6 In the
morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and
withers away.

What's he doing here? He's simply meditating on the brevity of life, that flowers flourish in the morning and then the afternoon sun causes them to wither and by evening they have faded away. And God sees it from his perspective, God is not inside of time like we are, he is outside of time so that a thousand years to God is like a four hour watch in the night. God has eternally existed but you and I are transient. We die and we return to dust and here's what you've got to think about as you contemplate life in 2016, as you're at the start of a new year: life, I like to say these things, life lulls us, life lulls you into a false sense of security. No doubt about it, because today, Tuesday, was pretty much like Monday was for all of us, wasn't it? Not much different from Sunday and 2016, the start of 2016 for most of us isn't really all that much different than 2015 or 2014 was. So life and the days seem pretty much the same and the years seem to be pretty much the same, and it lulls you into the sense that things are just the same and day-to-day you start to think it's always going to be like this. You just start to presuppose it without even thinking about it. It never occurs to you, most of you in your conscious thought, that life changes and life brings much difference eventually.

Actually, while we think about life being the same from day-to-day, actually there is a much different picture that you need to think about it. You need to think about it like this, curious, honest show of hands, not that you'd be dishonest about what I'm going to ask about because it really doesn't amount to too much: how many of you have been to Niagara Falls? Ah, good, you can appreciate this. You know what it's like to walk up to that rail, right? And you're just five feet away from your own destruction because that water is just pouring over the waterfall, right? You know what that's like, especially on the Canadian side. You can get so close to it and you're just right at the edge of it. It takes

my breath away. It creeps me out just talking about it right here, to be honest with you, and just the certainty of that water going over, boy, it takes your breath away, doesn't it? Joy knows, she's nodding and she's scared as she sits here just thinking about it, by a verbal description of it. Well, look, if you go upstream a half-mile or a mile there on the Niagara River, it doesn't look that threatening, in one sense, you know, that you can see the river moving but if you had never been there before, if you didn't know about Niagara Falls, you could look at that river and not think too much about it. It just looks like any other river, but if you got into the current of that river and it just pulls you and it just pulls you inexorably so that you are inevitably going to go over those falls if you got into the river. There is no getting out of it, really.

Life is like that. It looks the same day-to-day but you and I are in a current that is pulling us inexorably to the end. It is pulling us in a direction where life will most certainly end, and as we're in the middle of the current, it doesn't seem like it's that big of a deal, but suddenly the sounds start to get louder and you start to realize that there's something else going on than what you thought was a placid river. The unseen current of that river is bringing you to a certain destination. Well, life is like that. There is an unseen current in our lives that eventually, sooner or later, is going to bring us to a point where we face death. You see silent testimony to this when you walk in a cemetery. You see a man's name etched in stone or maybe on the plaque of a mausoleum, man's name etched in stone after he had lived 80 years. That's a good long life. 1910 to 1990, or 1852 to 1930. You know, during the course, viewed from inside his life, viewed from inside what was happening in a long healthy life like that, it must have seemed like it was going to go on forever. 20 yielded into 30 years of prosperity and health, 50, 70, still going strong, but then 79 came, and 80 came. I don't need to be more graphic than that, and life came to an end. For a time it must have seemed like he would live forever.

Beloved, one day it's going to be your name etched in stone. One day it's going to be your name on the plaque, not just with the beginning year that you all know now, but with the concluding year as well, and the question is: have you calculated that into your life? Moses here in Psalm 90 does so. What I want you to see is this: I understand that a lot of people don't even like to talk this way. They just push the thought of death out of their mind and they don't even want to calculate it. They would rather not even think about it and they'll deal with it when it comes but, beloved, you can't live life that way. Not rightly. Not biblically. You can't think rightly about life if you don't calculate its certain end into the way that you establish your priorities, can you? You can't think rightly about life if you think it's open ended. The fact that it is closed, that it is not open ended, means that you have to calculate that into the way that you think about existence. You have to embrace the brevity of life because when you understand that your life is brief, it humbles your pride and it influences your priorities in the brief few years that you have to live. I live much differently as a result of seeing people I love die suddenly, realizing that that could happen to me; seeing people die prematurely by earthly standards, and it just redefines life. You have to take that into account.

Well, that's what Moses is doing here and he's not being morbid, he's simply being realistic. That's so important. This is just being realistic about life. We can't wish this

aspect of existence away. And when you realize that even at the top of your health and prosperity, you're not long for this world, all of a sudden you don't boast in your accomplishments. All of a sudden your pride is humbled. And all of a sudden things that seemed important in your human boasting seem trivial by comparison and you say, "Do you know what I really want in life? What I really want is the end to go well. I want the outcome to be right regardless of the path it takes me to get there." If you calculate the brevity of life, it will change your priorities in life.

Why is it that our time is short? Moses addresses that question. Our time is short because God has judged the human race for sin. Look at verses 7 through 11. Psalm 90:7-11. He had just said that life flourishes, sprouts anew, evening fades and withers away. Why is it like that? Verse 7, "For," because,

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger And by Your wrath we have been dismayed. 8 You have placed our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your presence. 9 For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. 10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. [Soon it's gone.] 11 Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

What he's saying is life is brief, and in this next section that I just read, he says, it's brief because God has judged the human race for sin. Our secret sins are exposed in his presence. God is a holy God who does not accept the sin and rebellion of man as a permanent condition of the existence of the universe. And Romans 5, as you know, teaches us that death entered into the world through sin and so the sin of man has consequences and they are inescapable consequences. Death surely follows sin because Scripture says that the soul that sins, it will die, and every one of you in here tonight is a sinner, guilty before God. Your death is assured unless Christ returns first.

So we have to calculate this. We have to humble ourselves before the reality of a holy God having judged sin, and as we see people dropping in the news and celebrities or people in our lives that we love dying and moving on into eternity, we have to understand why it is that life is brief. Life is brief because God is holy and man is sinful and God doesn't tolerate it and death is the consequence of sin. Only then can we begin to think rightly about life, and then you say, "Okay, okay, death is coming. My death is coming because I'm sinful too," and all of a sudden you're just humbled. You cast aside this sense of immortality, this unspoken sense that, "I'll be the one exception, the one that never dies." No, that's not true. You won't be the exception, neither will I. And you say, "I need to take life seriously. I need to stop being double minded. I need to repent of my deceit. I need to repent of my arrogance. I need to repent of my hostility toward truth because I don't want to face God with those sins on my soul unconfessed." You know, you can only live like that if you've just rejected everything that Moses has said in Psalm 90.

Now, remember what I said about the context here and to understand what Moses is saying here in Psalm 90. Moses is writing this at the end of the wilderness wanderings where the whole generation of Israel would die in the wilderness as judgment for their rebellion against God. A generation of Israelites died over 40 years in the wilderness. If you do the math on it, the population of Israel times the years of 40 years, you calculate it out, it's an average of about 50 people per day in the nation that was dying, 50, 75, somewhere around in there. Here's the thing: Moses is the leader of the people of Israel, day after day after day after relentless monotonous day, more people are dying, more people are being buried. Another 50 people gone. Another 50 people gone. Another 50 people gone. 400 a week. That gets pretty wearisome. That gets pretty discouraging. Each grave reminding them about their disobedience when they wanted to return to Egypt rather than to take the Promised Land.

Put yourself in Moses' shoes. You know, he's leading a people doomed for destruction, a generation doomed for destruction, I should say. You know, he must have heaved sighs at the constant death, "Oh, another one. Moses, Omar is gone. Jude is gone. Levi is gone." Just picking the names out of a hat. So Moses is writing this from a deep perspective of understanding that life brings sorrow. We get started and then death takes us away, and that unseen dynamic governs life, and we don't, we can't grasp it because it's not so immediate to us. We tend to brush it off, it's going to happen to somebody else, and all of a sudden you're clutching at your chest. You're not ready. You can't grasp that in your natural ability. You can't calculate that well. You're wired to deny this. You're wired to push it away because, to one extent or another, most of us like the way that we are living, to some extent. So we want to deny that which is unpleasant.

Well, what Moses does as you carry on in Psalm 90, is he prays to overcome that false sense of security and there is a pivotal verse right in front of us now in verse 12. Look at verse 12 with me. He's talked about the eternity of God. He's addressed the brevity of life. He's addressed that life is brief because man is sinful in the presence of a holy God who must be feared. What do you do in response to that? How should you think? In verse 12, Moses lays it out. This is a verse that has influenced my life significantly. Verse 12, he says, "So," in light of everything that I've said here about your eternity and the brevity of life, so, God,

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

Maybe that we might gain a heart of wisdom. What's he saying? This is a very simple but earnest and profound prayer. This should be a defining prayer for you in 2016, to say, "Lord, in light of the reality of your eternity and the brevity of life, O God, would you by a work of your Spirit, grant to me the capacity to understand the brevity of my own life so that I would use my own window of opportunity wisely? Teach me, God, to number my days. Teach me to understand that life is brief, and let that knowledge and understanding cause me to live differently, live in a way that is wise rather than according to the manner of those who do not take that perspective into account." Beloved, have you calculated the reality of the end of your life into the way that you're living today? You

must do that if you're going to live wisely. Calculating the reality of the end of your life into today changes your priorities; it changes what you think is important; it changes the way that you respond to Scripture; it changes the value you place on the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. It changes everything that you want out of life, everything that you want out of relationships, totally turns it upside down.

Moses understands that we would not do that if we were left only to our own devices. If I could put it in colloquial terms, in kind of common terms, what Moses is saying here is, oh, if there was any way that I could seal this to your mind I would do it but I don't have the power except to preach and ask God by the work of his Spirit to seal this into your mind. Moses is saying and you should be thinking along with him, "God, I only get one shot at life. I don't get to do it over if I mess it up. Therefore, God, help me to get it right on the front end so that I don't come to the end with regret on the back end."

Let's make this practical. Periodically, especially you young people on my right and on my left and through the camera to the live stream, periodically, you come to times in life where you face decisions that you know will alter the course of your life whether it's employment, marriage, relocation, whatever it might be, and you're on the front end of it. I remember thinking through these things 35 years ago and how it changed my life. When you're there, when you're on the front end of it, before the decision is made, before things are unalterably set into motion and you have a measure of control over the decision, here's what you need to do. This is an application of Psalm 90:12, "Teach us to number our days so that we may present to you a heart of wisdom." When you're in that position, think ahead to the end of your life. Maybe you're a young man now, a young person now, but think ahead 40, 50, 60 years in life, and picture yourself on a rocking chair. I did this, and the power of it was almost overwhelming. You're an old man, you're an old woman now, and you're on that rocking chair looking back, thinking over life, and there's not time to do it over again. What is going to be important to you at that point in time? What's going to matter then? When you are at death's door and you are about to give an account to God for your life, what do you want to show for yourself?

Beloved, my precious Christian friends, I promise you that you're not going to want to be in that rocking chair having neglected biblical priorities in your life. You're not going to want to be in that rocking chair having simply given yourself over to the greatest possible pleasure and prosperity that you could extract out of earthly life and having shredded your family with excessive devotion to business or ministry or to a life of sin. You're not going to want that. Beloved, I beg you, honestly I beg you, I'll spare you the theatrics of getting down on my knees, but I beg you as a pastor and as a Christian friend, don't ignore the brevity of life and come to the end of life and have the realization settle in on you, "Oh, my God," I say it irreverently. I say it in the presence of a holy God. Don't structure your life so that you come to the end and say, "Oh, my God, I've wasted it all and I don't get to do it over again. I can't go back and change it. I can't go back and undo the people whose lives I have ruined with my sin. I can't go back and give myself over to biblical priorities of life. I can't go back and change it all."

I've said it before, life is not like golf. In golf, some people play with a mulligan and if you hit a bad shot, you take a mulligan and you swing again and you get another chance to get it right. You're not going to get that opportunity, beloved. You are not going to have the opportunity to do it over so you must think now, "What am I going to do with the remaining time so that I would live between now and the end in a way that is wise and reflects biblical wisdom?" Beloved, our day of reckoning, your day and mine, is coming. It's coming and so I beg you to seek Christ, to seek his word now while you have strength, while you have the mental capacity to do so, while you still have time. I beg you to respond to God's word by saying, "O Lord, teach me to number my days so that I would live wisely with the time I have left." Will you calculate the brevity of life into your approach to 2016? You must. You must. Some of you will not be here this time next year.

Now, look, some people think that's depressing to talk this way. Moses didn't see it that way. Moses didn't despair. Again, as I said, he's not being morbid, he's being realistic and look what it does, look where the outcome is as you go to the end of Psalm 90 here. What this reality does, what it did for Moses and what it should do to you, those of you who name the name of Christ, you should embrace this because the eternity of God and the brevity of your life should have a very sanctifying effect on your soul. It should drive you to God. It should drive you to humble yourself before him; to lay hold of his goodness and his grace; and to ask him for help in a way that if you think, you know, you're immune to it, you would otherwise never would do.

It brings us to our third point here this evening: you must embrace humility. You must embrace humility. Understanding the brevity of life humbles us. You and I, we need help. Moses, the great leader of Israel, needed help, how much more us? So look at what he does in verse 13. He turns to prayer and he starts asking God to be merciful to him. Look at verse 13. In light of what he's been through, here's the edifying closing thoughts that Moses brings to us here. Verse 13, he says,

13 Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants. 14 O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. 15 Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, And the years we have seen evil.

He's asking God to show him mercy. He's asking God to give him joy and what he's saying is, and perhaps this is where you're at, he says, "God, we would be depressed, I would be discouraged by this weakness of the brevity of my life except for the fact that I am appealing to you to be gracious to me. I'm asking you to show me mercy so that I could transcend the despair that the brevity of life would otherwise impose upon me. God, you are the giver of life. God, you are the source of joy. God, the joy of the Lord is our strength. Then, God, grant me grace that I might be able to walk through this brief life with a sense of your mercy, of confidence in your goodness, of joy despite the brevity." He's asking God for spiritual blessings in the midst of this. You see, you see that these realities don't bring you to a dead end of despair. It simply brings you to the throne of God and in a humble position by his eternal nature and the brevity of your life. You

come as a humble suppliant saying, "God, be merciful to me. God, show grace to me. God, tinge this brief existence with your eternal joy. Be good and kind to me, God, because I'm so weak and failing on my own."

Then he goes further and he asks God to bless his labor. He comes to God, look at verses 16 and 17, and he says, "God, give me an inward sense of joy," and then he expands out. And having been humbled but the brevity of his life, he says in verses 16 and 17, look at it with me. He says, "

16 Let Your work appear to Your servants And Your majesty to their children. 17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands.

"God, as I go through my life, as I'm doing what you have given me to do, God, I pray that you would bless it; that you would establish it in ways that go beyond natural human ability. I pray that you would supernaturally bless the work of my hands in a way that establishes it as something that was valuable in your sight."

Beloved, you may have regrets about the past. You may look back and see how people have wrecked your life with their dishonesty and unkindness, maybe you've wrecked the lives of others with your own sins, but here's the thing, this is where Psalm 90 brings you to finish: in the grace of God, in the hand of our omnipotent gracious God who loves to bless his weak and feeble children like you and me, in the grace of God, despite the regrets of your past, you can finish well. Moses is writing this at the end of his life and saying, "God, establish the work of our hands." One writer, one commentator summed it up like this, "So long as we are here, God requires us to do something. Let us therefore find out what that is and do it, and while we do it, let us pray that God may establish it so that it may remain to bless posterity." Do you know what I would want you, especially those of you that are members here of Truth Community Church and you love the ministry of Truth Community Church and you're committed to it, you're invested in it? Do you see in this prayer what our approach to our ministry should be here at Truth Community Church? You and I are just passing little shadows on the scene here, doing what we do, contributing and doing our part in the ministry. It should be the ongoing prayer of our hearts, "God, as we go forward in our brief lives in the ministry of this church, God, we pray that you would establish this church to bless posterity that hasn't even come into existence yet. God, establish the work of your word. Establish the work of those who preach your truth. Establish it so that it would bless those yet to be born. Confirm the work of our hands. Show us favor so that our brief weak lives would have something of lasting value to those who come after us in this life, and that it would echo into eternity with glory and praise to Christ."

And in your own individual personal lives, even those of you with gray hair and, you know, if you're like me and a lot more is in the rear view mirror than is in the windshield ahead of you, look, this is true for every one of us what I'm about to say: your prayer should be this, "Lord, I'm still here and I detect by that, I detect by my presence in my life now, I detect by that that you still have something appointed for me to do; that there is

still purpose in my existence. Lord, in the time that I have left, please, O God, help me get it right. Help me to see the circle of relationships that you have given me and let me be an influence for godliness and Christ upon them." That kind of renewed thinking will serve you well in the new year, no doubt about it. You see, you and I should be thinking about ourselves from the sense that we're simply agents in the furtherance of the eternal purpose of God. "Lord, let me wire into that, let my mind be saturated with that so that I live out that in whatever realm you have given to me." Your life, beloved, is not about you. It's not about you. How could it be about us when Christ died for us? It has to be about him.

Now, final thing. We said that you must embrace eternity, you must embrace brevity, and you must embrace humility. All of these things humble us and make us think differently about life. I'm going to give you a fourth point that goes beyond Psalm 90 and that is this: is that you must embrace priority. You must embrace your priority. Oh, and I'm so glad that I get to say this. I want you to know, I'll call a timeout here, I want you to know that I can't begin to express how much I appreciate the fact that you all come to hear God's word. You are a blessing and a gift from God to me to be able to have a people that want to hear Bible teaching and for me to be able to do it. I am so thankful that you come and make the effort to be here Sundays and Tuesdays, come with such generous, gracious, humble hearts. I love this church and when I say I love this church, I'm just saying you are the church here and it is a blessing to be a part of this ministry together with all of you, and it is a blessing to be able to say what I'm about to say to you because I think it will help you.

If you're a Christian, as you look into 2016, you cannot cling to this life, and what I mean by that is this, is that Christ redeemed you with an ultimate purpose that you would be with him in heaven. That's why he saved you, it's because he wanted you to be in heaven with him, and that is the ultimate purpose of your life. It's not about the happy circumstances that we would prefer here in this 70 or 80 year earthly existence. That's not it. That's inconsequential by comparison. Christ came to die on that cross. Christ shed his blood to redeem your soul, not for health and wealth here in this life, it was to secure the certainty that you would be with him in heaven forever, and the culmination of your existence is it yet to come. It is beyond the veil. It is in that realm, that glorious realm with Christ.

And so, beloved, what that means is as you grow in your understanding of that, as you are sanctified by the Spirit of God and you realize the purpose of your salvation, then your heart should long to be with Christ more than it desires to stay on earth. And that doesn't mean that we have a death wish. That doesn't mean that we don't enjoy the life that God has given us now. He has given that to bless us. This is the realm that he has given us to serve him, to love him, to proclaim him. We enjoy this life now but, beloved, we don't cling to that as if this earthly life is the end of our existence. We hold it loosely. We hold it loosely because we realize that all death does is simply usher us into the culmination, the realization of the purpose that Christ saved us to begin with, and that is only going to be glory.

Look at Philippians 1. Here's the concluding mindset that I would give you as we contemplate moving forward in 2016, or if you're listening to this 40 years from now, as you move forward in 2056. Philippians 1. Won't that freak them out if they hear that? You know, someone's actually listening to this 40 years from now. "Whoa, really?" Whatever. Philippians 1:21, look at what Paul says in this familiar passage. Here is the priority, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I don't know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." What's Paul saying here? He's saying, "I'll stay as long as Christ wants me to stay and I'll be glad to do it." Paul writing to the church in Philippi says, "I'll serve you and it will be to your benefit if I stay with you." But he says, "The deepest desire of my heart is to be with Christ, to be with my Redeemer, to be the one who bled for my soul. In the final analysis, I want to be with him." You see, and that's the true desire of every true Christian. Maybe you need a little time and help to think through that and to come to that conclusion and realization, but the path of Scripture is so clear and direct on this that the redeemed heart says, "I was saved to be with Christ in heaven forever. That's what I ultimately want. I love Christ more than anything on this earth, more than any circumstance in this life, more than any position or relationship that I could have. I want to be with Christ. So the ultimate culmination is what I long for." Now, if he in his wisdom says, "No, not yet. I want you there a little longer. There are things for you to do," I'll embrace that, but the heart priority, I want to be with Christ.

My goal, the reason that I exist as a Christian, the reason that you exist as a Christian, Laura, the reason that you exist as a Christian, is so that one day you would enter into God's eternal presence. That's why you exist, is for you to be in the immediate presence of Christ forever, and death only escorts you into that glory. Do you know what embracing that priority does? It frees you to leave when the time comes. You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to look at it with regret and say, "Oh, I wish I had a few more years to go." No, we look at death and we realize that from an earthly sense, it's an enemy still. Christ conquered death with his resurrection and Christ uses death to usher us into the realization of the whole purpose for which he saved us, that is how much he has overturned the consequences of sin. Sin lead to death, ushered death into the world, Christ now uses death to usher us as Christian into the presence of God. How great is he to be able to turn things so completely upside down like that?

So there's no fear. There's no reason for you to be afraid if you're in Christ. There is no reason to look back with regret because Christ has covered that. There is no reason to fear the future in this life because Christ is with us. That's our priority. For some of you, that's not your priority and your soul needs to be rebuked and chastened by everything that we've said here. You've lived in neglect of Christ. You're not even a Christian. You wear the mask of one but underneath is the reality that everyone might not suspect but God knows that you know. You're not even a Christian. You need to turn to Christ in humble faith for the forgiveness of your sins. Won't you turn to Christ? Won't you turn to him and his blood atonement for sinners and enter into this great spiritual current? Not a current that leads to earthly death and regret, but a current that sweeps us into heaven.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, grant us grace in this new year to remember your eternal purpose in the midst of the brevity of our lives. I pray for these brothers and sisters in Christ, some who have gone through such deep waters, such deep sorrows, and the waves seem to sweep them under at times. I pray, Father, that you would strengthen them, perfect them, comfort them, establish them in 2016. I pray for each one of us that you would give us satisfaction in your lovingkindness, rest and confidence in the love of Christ who cared so much for our souls that he set his own life aside, sacrificed it up to you that we might be redeemed. Father, as we enter into 2016, I pray that you would establish the work of our hands, establish the words of our lips, that they might benefit those who are with us now and those who will come after us. And, Father, we humbly, urgently pray that you would so direct us, so direct our lives, that by your grace we would one day hear the sweet words from Jesus, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." May 2016 for each one of us here be a great step forward to that great day. For the glory of Christ and in his name we pray. Amen.

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