

Wisdom for this Mortal Life

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Bible Verse: Psalm 90
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We come to Psalm 90 here this evening, the opening, the opening of Book 4 of the Psalms. Psalm 90 is the first of a series of related Psalms, Psalm 90 highlighting the transience of life, Psalm 91 being a call to trust in the Lord in light of that, and Psalm 92 answering that God will be faithful even to the end as we trust in him. Now, Psalm 90, I'm going to read it here in a moment and I just want to say a word by way of introduction, Psalm 90 is an intensely personal Psalm to me. It has had a profound impact on my life and I'm not going to try to hide that from what I have to say here this evening as we unfold things.

Let's read it to begin. Psalm 90, the heading says its "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God." Verse 1,

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. 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. 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. 11 Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? 12 So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom. 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. 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.

Now in this most magnificent Psalm, here's what's happening: there is a broad sweep of meditation that Moses is doing. He opens up meditating on the eternity of God and then he immediately contrasts that with the mortality of man and he places the eternal nature of God against the transient nature of man, and at the end of the Psalm that leads him to prayer. So in the process, what he has done is he has given for all time wisdom for this mortal life, and for some 3,500 years almost, people have been reading Psalm 90 since it came from the pen of Moses.

Now I always like to define terms right from the start. It is very important that we know what we mean as we use certain terms and tonight we're focusing on mortality. I didn't plan it this way but Sunday was a message on why immortality matters and you could almost have titled this message why mortality matters or what you do in response to mortality; immortality matters because we're going to live forever and we need to factor that into the way that we think about life and our philosophy of life, and the other side of that coin is that mortality matters because our lives are brief and we need to do something with them. There is a reality that must be factored into life. Both immortality and mortality have this effect, when they are properly considered they help us keep life into perspective, and not only that, when you properly calculate mortality into your approach to life, it has a way of defining the priorities by which you live and if you've never calculated mortality into your approach to life, now's the time. Even if you're in your sixties and seventies and eighties, it's time to start calculating that into the way that you think and approach life, and if you're younger, then you have all of the benefit of time to be able to make the most of this message, and so for those of you that are listening that are in your teens, in your early twenties, man, is this the time to take heed to Psalm 90 and to let it wrap its lot and its philosophy around your mind and let it shape you going forward.

As I've said in the past, I've taught this Psalm twice at Truth Community Church, once in 2013, once in 2016. I actually don't mind teaching it every three years but that's not the plan here, it's just the next Psalm in the series that we're doing here but I probably mentioned this. There was a sweet woman whose name I don't remember, who when Nancy and I got married gave us a very simple little wedding gift. She was not a woman of means and she just wanted to give us something and she gave us this very simple plaque that she no doubt found in a Christian bookstore that had Psalm 90:12 etched upon it. Psalm 90:12 says, "So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom." And she had no idea at the time how much that verse was going to impact my life going forward, and there are just certain verses that make an imprint on your mind and the Lord just uses them and Psalm 90:12 was one of those verses in my life, as I'll talk about in a little while.

For now, though, what we want to do is we want to exposit Psalm 90 before I get too overly personal about all of this, but God's word matters, doesn't it? Moses as he wrote this Psalm probably wrote this during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

During that wilderness time, the people of Israel were marching through, they had been judged by God and he had said that that entire generation would die in the wilderness, and so they're going through a 40 year purging as a nation to cleanse out all of the rebellious souls that had objected to God's work in bringing them out of Egypt. So day by day, year by year, people were starting to die off and if you do the math, I won't take you through all of this, if you do the math, that was anywhere between an average of 50 to 75 people dying day by day in the wilderness in Israel, and it's that that provides a bit of the backdrop for what Moses was seeing, what he was thinking, and what would have prompted him to write such a magnificent Psalm as this.

We're going to break it down into three points tonight, as I usually do. It seems like I can't count past three, and that's all right. The eternity of God, point 1: the eternity of God. Point 2: the mortality of man. Then point 3: the humility of prayer. The eternity of God, the mortality of man and the humility of prayer, and those things, that really kind of wraps it all up and if you can get your mind around those three points, you can have a focus that will help you long after the words that I say tonight are forgotten from your mind.

So let's start with point 1: the eternity of God as Moses meditates and then writes for the benefit of all the people of God who would follow after him now 3,500 years later. Moses here is drawing upon, for his meditation, he starts with the eternity, the eternal nature of God. Look at it there in verses 1 and 2. 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.

Moses starts this meditation dwelling on the nature and the essence of God and that is where all proper right thinking of man begins. We start with the nature, the purpose of God, and then we work things out from there, and as Moses begins here, he is connecting Israel with the people of faith who went before them and look at what he says there in verse 1. He's speaking about Israel, they weren't yet quite yet a nation so much because they weren't yet in the land, but they had developed into this mass of people under the leadership of God and he says in verse 1, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations," and what he's doing here is he's connecting the present group of the people of Israel with the people of faith who had preceded them. Now God had called Abraham 2,000 years before the time of Christ. Back in Genesis, Genesis 12, he calls Abraham to follow him. That was 2,000 years before the time of Christ, speaking in round numbers. Moses lived and this time of the exodus, I'm oversimplifying, I'm just using round numbers here, about 600 years later, Moses is writing Psalm 90, and so there has been an intervening period of 600 years during which the descendants of Abraham were multiplying and growing, Moses is calling all of that to mind and he says, "Lord, as our people have grown and expanded, You have been our dwelling place." What he means by that is, "God, You have protected us and sustained us. From our tiny numbers when we left Israel to come into Egypt, during our 400 years of slavery in Egypt where we multiplied and we were under harsh taskmasters, and very little was there at times to

encourage us, Lord, the underlying reality of our existence as a people was that You were protecting us, You were sustaining us, You were achieving Your purpose even when it didn't seem like anything was really happening." And as I like to say to just give a sense of perspective, 600 years in our terms, in our thinking of history as Americans anyway, would take us back to prior to the discovery of America by Columbus. Now that seems like ancient dark history to us, it's so long ago, and yet that is the timeframe that Moses is writing from. He's looking back in chronological terms to something that would have preceded the discovery of America by Columbus, connecting that time all the way through to where he is presently writing and saying, "God, You have been over us, You have been our security, You have been the driving force of our continued existence even though we have been living in slavery much of that time."

Here's the thing: God had been accomplishing his purposes even though at times there was very little external evidence of it, and he looks back over the sweep of centuries and says, "God, You have been working in the midst of all of this even though it may not have seemed like it at the time." And for us as Christians, we could look back 600 years and go back just a few decades prior to the time of the Reformation and look back at the subsequent 500 years of the subsequent 500 years of Reformation history and realize how God has had his hand upon his people, his hand upon his word, his hand upon the proclamation of the Gospel, and his kingdom has advanced, his church has grown, Christ has built his church just as he promised even through the ups and downs of the ages that have intervened since then. And what you and I need to do in response to that kind of thinking looking back at the window of 600 years of Israel's history that was prompting Moses to write, now in the church age looking back at the 500 years since the Reformation, looking back 2,000 years since the time of Christ, we need to think, we need to contemplate the way that God shelters and develops and grows his people according to his purposes no matter what the earthly opposition might be. If we would do that and contemplate providence rightly in light of God's word, we would be far less intimidated by the rise and fall of earthly leaders who are opposed to Christianity; we wouldn't be so wrapped up in the things of politics, the things of economics, the things of this life because we would realize that behind it all and seeing these unseen things with the eyes of faith, is that the hand of God is marching forward and is bringing to pass everything that he ordained to happen before the beginning of time, God is achieving his purpose without fail, and in that the people of God have great security, in that realm of faith, in that mental realm of knowing God and knowing the fulfillment of his purposes, that is where we find our stability. He is our rock, our refuge, and his eternal nature guarantees that he will never miss out on what he's doing with his people. You know, it matters what you think about the sovereignty of God and it is no small error for people to chip away at the sovereignty of God either in salvation or just in not recognizing it, not teaching it because we want to exalt the so-called free will of man. Beloved, I want to tell you, those things have long far-reaching ramifications and Moses would have had nothing of it.

Look at it there in verse 1 when he says, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. You have been stable. You have been unchanging. You have been

immutable and we as a people dwell in the shadow of Your protection," as we'll say in Psalm 91:1. He goes on in verse 2 here in Psalm 90 and he says,

2 Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

He says, "God, You had no beginning. God, You will have no end. You established Your eternal purpose before time began." He's looking at this and he's saying a statement of reverence, of fear, a spirit of worship and he's saying, "God, You are working out Your purpose in time and after time ends, You will have accomplished Your purpose to perfection and nothing will have hindered. There will be no diminishment of what You intended to accomplish. You will do it all because of Your great sovereign eternal power and purpose." And his point here as he continues on, where he's about to go with this, is this: he is setting forth the fact that we as the people of God, you could say and expand it to all of humanity for that matter, humanity is living, history is unfolding in the context of the eternal purpose of God. There is nothing that is happening outside of God's eternal purpose. Even the sin of man is calculated in the eternal purpose of God and he uses it to accomplish his purposes. The hand of God, beloved, is in absolutely everything that happens. His eternal purpose will be achieved. It will prove to be good in the end. In another book of Moses, in Genesis 50:20, he records how man meant it for evil but God meant it for good; in Acts 2, godless men nailed Christ to the cross and they were merely carrying out the eternal purpose of God when they did.

You really need to factor this into the way that you think about life. The things that we are talking about here tonight shape your entire mind. They inform the entire way that you think about life. What you think about the sovereignty of God and his ability to work out his purposes changes everything, and a man who does not understand these things or who denies these things will live much differently than the man who affirms and believes them, having been saved by the power and the blood of Christ. This matters, I'm telling you, and if it didn't matter, it wouldn't be in Scripture.

So Moses briefly starts out with this statement of the surpassing eternity and sovereignty of God and that's the start of his meditation. Now he goes on, having said that God is eternal, he now changes focus, having looked up vertically, so to speak, at God and praising and honoring the eternity of God, he now turns his focus to the nature of man. He does this without a real transition but the contrast is certainly clear enough. We come to point 2 here this evening: the mortality of man. The mortality of man.

Now, Moses is still talking to God here. He is still praying, in a sense, here as we go to verse 3 as we see because he's still speaking in the second person "You." Look at it there in verse 3 with me. He says, "You turn man back into dust." Well, who is the "You"? It's the same Lord that he had addressed at the beginning of the Psalm.

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? In poetic language, he is now talking about the brevity and the mortality of man. He's had such an exalted view of God as he opened it up, but now he turns to a contemplation of man and says, "God, man is not like You at all. You who are the same from generation to generation, transcendent over ages, living beyond and existing beyond the realm of time, God, by contrast we live in this transient temporary realm where we flourish for just a short period of time and then the wind blows on us and we are gone." He is making a grand statement, a grant contrast between the eternity of God and the mortality of man and what he is saying here is that, "God, unlike You, we are subject to death. We die and our time span is insignificant."

Look at verse 4 as he contemplates time from God's perspective. He says in verse 4, "For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by." A millennium, a day, there's no difference in the sense of God. The time span is insignificant from God's perspective because he dwells outside of time. It's not that God is unaware of time, it's not that he doesn't act in time, but his perspective on time is completely different from ours. Twenty-four hours to us and a thousand years is vastly different. To God, he is so far beyond time, that the distinction is insignificant. A thousand years to God is the same as a four hour watch in the night to him because he dwells outside the realm of time, time is no restraint on his character or being, time is no restraint on the fulfillment of his purposes or what he intends to do. That's from God's perspective but for us, it's important for us to realize that time has a much different significance to us, and unlike the eternity of God, we are transient and passing.

Look at verses 5 and 6 as he contemplates men who die and go back to the dust. He says in verse 5, "You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away." We know this, especially in springtime. I love springtime. It's my favorite time of year by far. I love the flowers that bloom up and the trees that bloom, and I just love that, but every year, every year it's the same. The beauty of it is passing. The flowers fade and the petals start to peel back and, you know, they wither up and they blow away. The beauty is transitory. As real as the beauty is, it's transitory. With each passing year I realize that I have fewer springs to enjoy as life moves on this way, and what Moses is doing here is comparing the life of man to the passing grass of the field. Man flourishes for a time. Oh yeah, it's longer than the two week span of a flower, but it's really in the context of God's eternity, it's exactly the same principle, it flourishes for a while, the breath comes on it and it withers and goes away, and that is the only proper way to think about the nature of the life of man. Your life, beloved, even for you young people, your life is like a waterfall that is cascading over the cliffs of time. The river comes rushing down and there's a current and a flow to it and it passes by, passes along the banks of the edge there, and then it comes over to the waterfall and down it goes. That's what our life is like. It's swept away like a flood, and this is the picture that Moses is giving to us; the temporary nature of life where man

flourishes for a time seems to be a pillar of strength or a picture of beauty, and yet time goes on and it all starts to crumble away until it is gone.

Now, most of you know that I like to go to cemeteries. I like to walk around in cemeteries, especially where my prior generations are buried, one of my favorite places on earth to go, and some people find that morbid and, you know, get a little bit edgy when I start talking this way, but bear with me here for a moment. I won't dwell on it long, but you need to think about life from this way. This is what Moses is saying just illustrated a little bit differently. A cemetery gives silent testimony to the reality of what Moses is talking about here, the brief nature of life. You go and you look at carved out in granite or carved out in marble the name of a man you know, maybe you don't know, and you see that that man lived from 1795 to 1882, he lived 87 years, and during the course of his life he was strong, he was prominent, from all appearances it looked like he would just go on indefinitely living and continuing on in the strength of his days and in the pursuits of his life, but now his name is etched in stone after those 87 years are gone, and he who once seemed to be strong is now forgotten in the grave. No one remembers what he looks like, few even remember his name, if the stone has worn away, and that strength in real terms here, that strength that he exhibited in the most profound way was just an illusion. It wasn't real. It wasn't lasting. It wasn't eternal like God is. It was a flourishing for a time that had an endpoint and then it moves on and life is over for him, and what Psalm 90 is calling you to do, each one of you in here today, what Psalm 90 is calling each one of us to contemplate is the fact that that reality of the brevity of life is what marks you as well. This is the reality of your life. Even in the vigor and strength of your youth right now, beloved, it is temporary. It is passing and soon enough it will be your name that is etched on stone in a cemetery. Soon enough it will be your remains that are dealt with in other ways to think, and however long you live whether it's 30 years or 90 years, the outcome is quick and the outcome is the same: one day it's going to be your name that is being etched upon a stone.

Now look, look, it is just so critical for you and I not to shy away from this kind of thinking because this is biblical thinking, and the fact that it makes us uncomfortable is no reason not to embrace it and to understand it because this is what God's word is saying to us. God says these things in his word for our benefit and for our help and for our instruction. Moses isn't being a morbid here, he is being realistic and I don't think it's too much to say that until a man has calculated death into his perspective on life, he hasn't even begun to live.

Now Moses answers an important question, answers a theological question beginning in verse 7: why is it like that? Why is it that our lives are brief? If God is eternal and we're made in the image of God, why are our lives brief? Why is it that we flourish for a time and then we fade away? Well, he answers that question in verse 7. I love this Psalm. It's just so profound. He says in verse 7, "For." For. He's explaining what he had just said. He's giving a reason for it. Why do we flourish and then wither away? Verse 7,

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. [We leave this earthly existence behind.] 11 Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

What is he talking about here? Well, remember that he's writing in the context of a generation of Israelites falling in the wilderness, every grave a fresh reminder about their disobedience to God. What he is saying here is that we are experiencing this realm of death because we are experiencing your wrath and anger against our sin. We are being punished for our sin. Your fury and wrath is against our rebellion and disobedience against you and every grave was a fresh reminder, if they thought about it rightly, about their disobedience when they wanted to return to Egypt instead of following the pillar of cloud and fire into the Promised Land. Inexcusable. And you expand it out and you realize that what was true in a microcosm of Israel is true for all of men.

Look at Romans 5:12 with me just as a brief reminder for you about where death comes from. Where does death come from? It wasn't present in creation before the fall of man but when Adam disobeyed, he brought death upon the entire human race. Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man," speaking of Adam, "sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Why is there death? It's because man sinned against God and the penalty for sin was death, death in terms of immediate alienation from God, death in terms of physical death when the soul is separated from the body, and ultimately eternal death for those who are not redeemed from their sin. Death is a multifaceted reality of existence since Adam sinned and we all shared in it with him, not only shared in it with him as the representative head of the human race, but shared in it by our own nature and by our own choice and by our own desires, you, we're talking about here.

So the reason that there is death, the reason that life is mortal, the reason that life is brief and transient is because of the sin of man that invoked the wrath of God against humanity. Death was the judgment for sin, "The wages of sin is death," and that's what Moses is referring to. In a humble expression of worship and meditation to God, he says in verses 3 to 6, our life is brief, mortal and transient, and he goes on to say, "God, the reason that it's like that is because Your wrath is against us. We've sinned against You. Your fury is invoked against our rebellion and disobedience and, God, this is really really sad."

Look at verse 10 again with me, "As for the days of our life, they contain 70 years, due to strength 80 years, if we go really well we go 80 years," he says, "but the pride of our life is just labor and sorrow then it's gone and we fly away." You know, if I can go back to the cemeteries with you for just a moment, it slightly amuses and saddens me at the same time when I go to an unfamiliar cemetery, there's always somebody who at one time was a big community leader and a prominent guy whose family built him the biggest monument in the place, right? You know, and you've got the smaller stones like most of

us will have if we're buried in the cemetery like that, you know, the modest stones maybe as wide as the pulpit and, you know, a fraction of the height, and you know, "Here lies So-and-so," and whatever, but somebody's got to have the 30 foot tall monument or the big mausoleum that looks like a small house in it, and you come to that afterwards and the whole point is to speak to how prominent and great this man was or this woman was. You know, with the passage of just a few years, it just becomes a mockery of the very thing that it was supposed to be commemorating. If you don't know who the guy is, that monument just looks like a big waste of money, and it was. "This man was important." Really? Who was he? I don't even recognize his name, and the pride of all of that was just meaningless. He was trying, his family was trying to keep his name perpetuated for generations and one or two generations later people are scratching their heads and saying, "Why did they put so much stone into that?"

This, beloved, why does this matter? Why are we talking about this and why am I illustrating this way? This shows us, it illustrates for us the truth of what Moses is talking about, the pride of life is just labor and sorrow, there is nothing lasting or permanent about this life, not even the significance that is communicated by your headstone at a cemetery. So we need to think completely differently about what life signifies and what the point of it is because Moses is saying here life brings sorrow, we get started and then death takes us away. This is undeniable. God's word can never be successfully refuted but this in particular is just undeniable for anyone who would take time to think about it and look at it with open eyes. We're going to die. All the generations before us have died and we're going to join them in that realm of the dead, speaking humanly. And beloved, Moses is writing this for a purpose, not to depress us but to instruct us. This unseen dynamic about the nature of life and the nature of death, it governs all of life but we have a problem at precisely this point, you and I have a problem at precisely this point: we do not have the ability in our natural mind and in our natural power to grasp that because you tend to live by what you see. You live in the realm where life is pretty much the same day after day after day, and without even realizing it, you start to assume and presuppose that because yesterday was like this and today was like this, that tomorrow will be like this as well, and you don't even start to contemplate that it's not always going to continue and, yes, tomorrow won't always be like today and yesterday was. And you can't grasp that in your natural ability and here's what it does to you: it creates in you a false sense of security that life will go on as it always has and that is not true, and Moses says and point out to us toward evening it fades and withers away, we've been consumed, 70 or 80 years and we're gone and we fly away, but the vast majority of people don't have the wisdom to stop and think about that and calculate it into the way that they approach life. They just keep doing what they're doing without contemplating what the reality of life really is. Yeah, and yeah, I get animated about this. That's all right.

You see, your challenge is that you can't grasp that in your natural ability, with your natural faculties. You live by sight and not by faith, not informed by the word of God, and so what does Moses do? Moses has a conclusion to draw from that that is profoundly significant. Moses has identified the problem. He says in verse 11, "Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? God, You're angry against our sin. God, we are mortal and transient and we're going to die and life is

short and who understands that?" Who understands that? Who gets that? Who grasps that rightly? The implied answer is no one does naturally.

Now look at verse 12 in light of that. He says, "So. So in light of all of these things that I've been saying, Lord, in light of Your eternity and the mortality of man and our inability to grasp the significance of what all of this means for our individual lives, so therefore in light of all of that, God, I have another prayer request for You, God." Verse 12, "I pray that You would

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

"God, we need You to show grace and favor to us, to enlighten our minds, so that we would consider time and the brief window of the life that we have properly. God, I need Your help to think rightly about the nature of life otherwise I'm going to squander it. I'm going to waste it. Help me to use and consider time in light of the mortality and brevity of life, God." Moses understands that we would not do that if we were left to our own devices because we are too fascinated by what we see around us, we are too much in love with ourselves, and we just have this natural thought that I'm just going to keep on living and keep on living and keep on living. That's the natural way that men think before life starts to get away from them, and so Moses is praying, "God, teach us to number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom. God, help us to think rightly about the brevity of life so that we would live in a wise way in response to it, and not squander the days that have been given to us by Your gracious hand. Teach us to number our days."

Now, let's make this really practical. I'm going to repeat an illustration that I've used in the past, and that's all right. You know, looking out on you and knowing so many of you and your life circumstances, some of you on the cusp, on the edge of important life decisions, deciding what you're going to do, making important decisions about what life lies ahead, and periodically life brings us those things, decisions that will alter the course of your life forever. Job, what kind of job or career you're going to pursue? What kind of education, where are you going to go to school at? Where are you going to relocate? Who are you going to marry? All those kinds of things, and you're on the front end of those decisions and saying, "What do I do? How can I think about these things rightly and how can I make a good and wise decision?" I've said this to people so many times in so many different places, when you're on the brink of decisions like that, here's my encouragement to you: follow the thinking of Psalm 90 and think ahead to the end of your life. Picture yourself sitting on a rocking chair. You're on a porch someplace, life is basically over, you know that you don't have too much time left, your strength is gone and your days are few, you're an old man or you're an old woman and you're looking back on your life at that time. It's an imaginary exercise but I think it's helpful and here's the thing, here's the thing, man, I plead with you and if you're already at that point in life, that's okay, just teach it to somebody else who's coming up behind you, you're sitting on that rocking chair and here's the reality of life: it's occurring to you that you don't get to do it over again. You don't get another chance you had one chance and whatever you did with it, that's what you've got now as you're sitting in the rocking chair and remember, we're

juxtaposing, we're doing a little bit of time travel here, in reality you're on the front end of life, the front end of decisions but you're thinking about it at the end looking back on it. Here's the whole point: when you're sitting in that rocking chair, beloved, what's going to be important to you at that time? What's going to matter then when you look back on life? What are you going to want to have to show for your life or for your decisions then? What's going to be important then? When you are at death's door and you are about to give God an account for your life, what do you want to show for yourself? I can tell you this: you don't want to be sitting in that rocking chair having squandered your life on the foolish pursuits of youth; you don't want to have squandered it in sin, having neglected Scripture, having neglected biblical priorities or having shredded your family with excessive devotion to business, ministry, or a double life that you think you're hiding from others. I can promise you that when you're in the rocking chair, you're not going to be glad you did that and I'm saying these things sympathetically to help you. I know I'm saying them strongly but I'm saying it strongly just because it's so important.

Beloved, let me shift tone here, beloved, whether you've got two years or you've got 70 years to look forward to in the natural course of things, I plead with you, I beg you to live your life in a way that when you're sitting in that rocking chair, you're not sitting there thinking, and I say it reverently, "Oh my God, I've wasted it all. I can't do it over and it's too late and I squandered it. I played games through all of my life. I never took God's word seriously, I never even responded to the Gospel of Christ. Oh, I can put on a show for man but I never gave Him my heart. I never loved Him with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind. I just played the part of a hypocrite and now I've squandered it all." And by every appearance, some of you give me the impression that that's exactly the trajectory that you're on. I worry over you. I worry over what you seem to consider and what you seem to think is important in life. It worries me no end.

You see, beloved, that day of reckoning is coming and you are in a position now responding to God's word here tonight, you're in a position to change the trajectory of that and ultimately it's really not the rocking chair that matters, is it, it's the fact that the rocking chair is just a preliminary act before you actually give an account to God for your life, and you have to give an account to him for your life because even as Christians, we're going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for the things that we've done in the body. And what are you going to do with that? What are you going to say, then? What are you going to say? I can tell you what you ought to pray right now, "O God, teach me to number my days so that I will live wisely," and let's also just humble ourselves even further and just realize that as we talk about these things, it illustrates for us how much we need a redeemer to conquer death for us, how much we need Christ to overcome our sin and to overcome our foolishness so that we might be delivered safe through that passageway, so to speak. "Lord, teach me to number my days so that I would live wisely."

Now look, I'm about to do something that I don't want to do, I hadn't planned to do this until about an hour ago. I'll probably regret it when I go to bed tonight but we know each other, you know me, I'm here as a pastor, and if I can be personal for just a moment and pass and deal with a question that I get asked all the time. People ask me and I'm just

illustrating how you think about this, how this applies and what it looks like. It's not to talk about me but to help you. People ask me often, "Why is it that you," speaking to me, "why did you leave a law practice, why did you abandon being an attorney to go into ministry? What was that like for you?" I get asked that question a lot and there's a long answer but there's a short answer in this context right here, and at the end of the day it was very very simple. I was about 30. I don't know where the thought came to think about a rocking chair thing like this, I don't know where that thought came from, but I was 30 in the midst of a law practice that I really enjoyed and to this day I still miss, but I looked ahead to the rocking chair and I asked myself what do I want to look back on that I had given my life to. When I get to the rocking chair, what do I want to look back on, of having given my life to, and I knew that I didn't want to have to show for my life a career in law when there was an alternate path of giving myself to God's word, and that's what I wanted to sit in the rocking chair and look back on and remember, was that I had given my life to God's word and I'll trust God to honor that when I stand before him in judgment. It was that simple. This thought of the rocking chair changed the entire trajectory of my life.

Now let me clarify something really quickly here. It is not at all, I don't say that because every man needs to go into ministry. That's not what I think at all. I don't even recommend it as a career choice, frankly. I'll explain that some other time. I'm glad to be doing what I'm doing. The point is that every man, every woman, does not need to go into ministry but every man or every woman does need to do this, every one of you, you do need to number your days and calculate in what you're doing with your time and with your priorities and with your resource and what you're doing because at some point, at some point the end is going to come and whether you have time to reflect back on it or not, what you want to live life from is from a perspective that when I reached the end, I can look back and say, no matter how it went, I at least made choices that were informed by the fact that I was living a brief life under the eye of God. That's what you need to do. That's how Christians live life. And you young guys, you've got a great opportunity to set the course now. You older guys, some of you maybe having squandered an awful lot, well, let me just remind you that we do serve a God of grace and that if you squandered it and you look back and you say, "I have lived selfishly," this is why Christ came. Christ came to bring grace to sinners just like you and that you can go to Christ even now and confess a lifetime of sin and find him willing to receive you and to forgive you and restore the years that the locusts have eaten, the years that you've wasted, and even if it chronologically it's a small window of time after a lifetime of sin, that there is still grace and productivity and an opportunity to live to the glory of God even if it's short by comparison. It's the nature of grace to say, "Come, have at it. Come all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." He's able to restore the years that the locusts have eaten and for that we praise him and thank him. But the younger you are and the more that you're on the front end, the more is your opportunity, and now that you've heard it, it is your responsibility to respond to the word of God what you give your life to. This matters.

Well, in response to all of that, let's look finally and quickly at number 3: the humility of prayer. The humility of prayer. Understanding, this ends on a joyful note, Psalm 90 does,

understanding, contemplating, meditating on the brevity of life, the mortality of life, it humbles us. It sobers us and it leaves us recognizing that there are dynamics about life that are just beyond our ability to grasp and to respond to, and we need help. We need help. The whole of this, the eternity of God and the mortality of man, drives us to a position of humility before God. Moses is writing this toward the end of his life. By the way, for what I was just saying, that's a good point to remember. Moses lived to be 120. God took him at the end of that 40 year wandering, he probably only had a very short number of years of his own life to live when he was writing this, and what did Moses, the man of God, have to say then? He turns to prayer in verse 13. Look at it with me. It would be depressing, "God, we would be depressed by all of this weakness so, God, I ask You for grace. I ask You for help." Look at verse 13.

13 Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants.

He's praying for mercy. "God, have mercy on us. Be sorry for us. Give us joy that we don't even deserve."

Verse 14,

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.

What is he saying here? He's saying, "God, show us mercy. God, the reality of this would crush us if You left us here, and so I'm asking You to show mercy to us, to be sorry for us, and to help us even in our inner man to give us joy to replace the despair that we would otherwise feel in light of these things." There is joy in Christ even in light of the brevity and mortality of man. Moses says, "Lord, give that to us in our inner man. Help us to be enraptured by You, by Your character, by Your grace, and if we can see Your grace and be satisfied with Your grace, then we can sing for joy, we can be glad all of our days. God, help us in our inner man to transcend what would otherwise take place."

Then he gives a second prayer in verses 16 and 17. He prays for God to grant a lasting impact to his life. Look at verse 16 with me.

16 Let Your work appear to Your servants And Your majesty to their children.

"God, make Yourself known to us. God, You are the answer to this brevity of life. You are the answer that satisfies our soul, and so make Yourself known. Break into this earthly realm of despair and make Yourself known and show Your majesty to us."

Verse 17,

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.

Moses wanted his life to have a lasting value and so he says, "God, here's what we're doing, here's what I'm doing, confirm it." In other words, "Establish it, bless it so that somehow it has an enduring impact on posterity; that what I do will outlive my natural life and somehow turn to be a blessing to those who come after me." And what all of this means, beloved, for those of you that are older especially, you may have regrets about the past. Some of you aren't even all that old and you have regrets about the past, don't you? But here in this prayer of Moses, my friends, what you find is this, is that by grace you can finish well. You can finish well. One writer said this, said, "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." Here's what you should be thinking no matter whether you're young or old, here's the way that you should think in light of Psalm 90, "Lord, I'm still here. I'm still here. I detect by that," here's the way that you should think, beloved, "I detect by the fact that I am still here that I still have work to do, that there is still purpose in my remaining days appointed by You. God, I pray, God, I ask You, God, I beg You to guide my steps and to give me enlightened understanding so that I can see what that is and that I can devote my time and energy to that which You would be pleased to bless."

And with all of that said, to just wrap this up. Time goes so quickly. "Yeah, that's right, Don. The whole Psalm is about that." But I was only thinking about the 60 minutes here. Beloved, we're family here together. Let me just say this: if you are a Christian, God does not intend for you to cling to this life. This life is mortal, is passing, it is brief. Yes, you are to use that time to his glory, to love him and to serve him while you can, but to recognize that this life is not why God created you. The purposes for which God created you transcend this life. There are eternal purposes that God has appointed you to and whether God takes you when you are 30 or whether God takes you when you're 90, he has appointed for you a destiny, he has appointed for you a purpose that lives on long after you're gone. Your priority is God's eternal purpose, not your earthly stuff. Ultimately, Christ redeemed you to be with him in heaven forever. The Apostle Paul in Philippians 1 said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain, to depart and to be with Christ is very much better." Beloved, that is the blessed the position that all of us have as Christians, not to fear death, not to resent it, not to run from it when it comes to us, but rather to embrace it understanding that death is your escort into glory and all fear is gone then, you're free to leave when the time comes, you look back and bid farewell to life and you say, "God, be gracious, be merciful to me, the sinner." That's what I intend to pray with my dying lips if I have breath and thought think it, to just look back over all of the life of failure and sin and despair and everything that I messed up, and to go before him not with boasting in my accomplishments but, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," and knowing that our gracious Lord is disposed to answer that because he is favorable to us as he showed when he died for us on the cross, and in these things we find a philosophy and priorities by which we can live. May it be true for each one of you.

Let's pray.

Lord, what else can we pray? We could not improve on the words of Moses inspired by Your Spirit that have stood the test of three and a half millennia, and which are just as true and powerful today as they were back then. For each one, Father, under the sound of my voice, I pray that You would teach us to number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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