

“Teach Us to Number Our Days”

Living Wisely in Light of Eternity

Psalm 90

The older we get, the faster it seems that time moves. Days turn quickly into years, and years into decades — and before long, we begin to realize just how brief life really is. It doesn't take long before we begin to measure life not in years ahead, but in years behind.

That's the problem this psalm addresses.

This psalm is the only one attributed to Moses (some think Psalm 91 was as well, but it doesn't state that in the heading). The Holy Spirit uses the life of Moses to shape this psalm.

- Moses witnessed:
 - The brevity of life in the wilderness
 - An entire generation die under God's judgment (Numbers 14).
- He saw firsthand:
 - The holiness of God
 - The seriousness of sin
 - The frailty of man

This is not the reflection of a young man looking ahead — it is the prayer of an old man who has watched an entire generation die.

Psalm 90 confronts us with two unchanging realities:

- The eternity of God
- The brevity, or frailty of man

In light of those realities, it teaches us how to live wisely before Him.

I. THE ETERNAL GOD — OUR DWELLING PLACE (VV. 1-2)

Moses begins with God — not with man. Before he speaks of life's frailty and brevity, he establishes God's eternity.

This means, as applied to us today, that we will never rightly understand our life until we first understand our God.

A. The refuge of His people (v. 1)

1. "Dwelling place" (יִלְוֹד) — refuge, habitation, shelter. Not just a place to visit, but a place to live. God is the abiding place of His people.
2. "Lord" (Adonai) — emphasizes His authority, sovereignty, and relationship.
3. "In all generations" — God has been the refuge of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and of Israel in Egypt and the wilderness. Even when Israel had no land, no home, and no stability, they still had a dwelling place in God.

B. The rule before creation (v. 2a)

1. "Before the mountains" — a symbol of strength, permanence, and stability.
2. "Brought forth" / "formed" — this is language of creation.
3. God existed before everything we consider permanent ever came into being.

C. The reign without limitation (vs. 2b)

1. "From everlasting to everlasting" — no beginning, no ending
2. "Thou art God — unchanging existence
3. God is self-existent and unchanging.

Isaiah 57:15

¹⁵ For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

II. THE FRAIL MAN — OUR PASSING LIFE (VV. 3-6)

A. The return to dust (vs. 3)

1. "Thou turnest man..."
 - a) God is seen as being active here — not passive.
 - b) This is not just speaking of what we call "natural death." It is divinely appointed mortality.
2. "To destruction" (נִדְּבַר) — crushed, reduced, brought low. The idea here is not annihilation, but reduced back to dust.
3. "Return, ye children of men" — this is the curse of the fall.

Genesis 3:19

¹⁹ In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

B. The relativity of time (v. 4)

1. "For" — explains verse 3, and answers the question as why life is so brief. It's because God's perspective on time is entirely different from ours.
 2. "A thousand years... as yesterday" — what seems long to us, to God, is already gone.
 3. "A watch in the night" — about 3-4 hours (the shortest division of time in their reckoning of time).
- We live as though we have plenty of time — God sees how little we actually have.

C. The rapid passing of life (vv. 5-6)

1. Life swept away — "as a flood" — sudden, overwhelming, and irresistible.
 2. Life like a sleep — "they are as a sleep" — fleeting, unconscious of passing time.
 3. Life like grass — "in the morning... in the evening" — "morning," there is growth and flourishing. "Evening," it is withered and cut down.
- In other words, a full life cycle in a single day.

James 4:14

¹⁴ Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

III. THE CAUSE OF MAN'S FRAILTY — THE WEIGHT OF DIVINE

WRATH (VV. 7-11)

What Moses is about to say explains everything that came before.

A. The reality of God's wrath (v. 7)

1. "Consumed" — worn down, brought to an end
 2. "Anger" / "wrath" — two terms intensifying the same truth. This is holy, righteous judgment.
 3. "We are troubled" (צָרָה) — carries the idea of dismayed, terrified, overwhelmed.
- The brevity of life is not only natural — it is judicial. We often think of death as a normal part of life, but Scripture presents it as a consequence of sin.

Romans 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

B. The revelation of man's sin (v. 8)

1. "Set... before thee" — nothing hidden or overlooked. Sin is fully exposed before God.
2. "Our secret sins" — not just outward action, but hidden thoughts; private motives; inner corruption.
3. "In the light of thy countenance" — God's presence gives perfect illumination. What is hidden is fully visible to God.

C. The resulting brevity of life (vv. 9-10)

1. Life under wrath (v. 9)

- a) "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath..." — Life is lived under the shadow of judgment.
- b) "As a tale *that is told*" (נִגְזָרָה) — the idea is a sigh, a fleeting sound, or a passing breath. In other words, life is not just short — it is fragile.

2. Life's span defined (v. 10)

- a) "Threescore years and ten..." — 70 years
- b) Even at its best ("if by reason of strength, they be fourscore years") — "Yet is their strength labour and sorrow" — burden, difficulty, pain
- c) "It is soon cut off, and we fly away" — sudden, final, inevitable.

Job 14:1

¹ Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble.

D. The reverence for God's power (v. 11)

- 1. "Who knoweth..." — this is a rhetorical question. The implied answer is no one fully understands it.
 - 2. "The power of thine anger" — God's wrath is real, powerful, and often underestimated.
 - 3. "According to thy fear, so is thy wrath" — this means that the wrath of God is as great as He is to be feared, and He is infinitely worthy of fear.
- We do not fear God as we should because we do not understand His wrath as we ought.

Hebrews 10:31

³¹ *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the

| living God.

- In light of all this — the eternity of God, the frailty and brevity of life, and the reality of judgment — what should we do? The answer is verse 12: “So teach us to number our days...”

IV. THE RESPONSE OF WISDOM — A PRAYER OF GRACE AND RESTORATION (VV. 12-17)

The right response to life’s brevity and God’s holiness is prayer for wisdom, mercy, and purpose.

A. A prayer for wisdom (v. 12)

1. “So...” — this is the turning point of the psalm. In light of everything previously said...
2. “Teach us” — wisdom is learned from God, not discovered by man.
3. “Number our days” — doesn’t mean to count them. It means to recognize their brevity, value their significance, and live with a desire to serve the Lord with purpose.
4. “That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” — living rightly in light of truth.

Ephesians 5:15–16

¹⁵ See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, ¹⁶ Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

James 1:5

⁵ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

B. A plea for mercy (v. 13)

1. "Return, O LORD" — this isn't saying that God has moved, but that His favor seems withdrawn.
 2. "How long?" — cry of weariness, longing, and dependence.
 3. "Let it repent thee" — not speaking of a change in God's nature, but a change in His dealings toward His people.
- The only hope for sinful man is the mercy of God.

Habakkuk 3:2

² O LORD, I have heard thy speech, *and* was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

C. A pursuit of joy (vv. 14-15)

1. Satisfaction in mercy (v. 14)
True satisfaction is not in possessions or good circumstances — it is in the mercy of God.
2. Balance in affliction (v. 15)
Moses doesn't deny affliction — he asks God to balance it with joy.

Psalms 30:5

⁵ For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning.

John 16:22

²² **And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.**

D. A desire for God's work (v. 16)

1. "Thy work" — His activity: redemption, deliverance, power
2. "Thy glory" — His character on display
3. Generational vision — "thy servants" (present); "their children" (future)

Psalm 78:4

⁴ We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

E. A request for lasting impact (v. 17)

1. "The beauty of the LORD" — speaks of His favor, grace, and divine approval
2. "Establish thou the work of our hands" — without God, our work fades; with God, our work endures.

Psalm 127:1

¹ Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Conclusion:

This psalm set our minds on the eternity of God while

reminding us of the frailty of man. The reason for that frailty is the reality of sin and divine judgment for that sin.

Because of this, Moses penned the prayer in verse 12: "So teach us to number our days..."

To "number our days" is not simply to count them — it is to consider them carefully, to value them rightly, and to live them wisely in light of eternity.

The question is not whether life is short — we know it is. The question is, "What are we doing with the life God has given us?"