

Psalm 90

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[0:00] Would you turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Psalms, right in the middle of your Bibles, and please find Psalm 90. It will be important that you listen carefully as I read, follow along in your own Bible.

This is God's Word, Psalm 90. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You return man to dust and say, Return, O children of man. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. You sweep them away as with a flood. They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning.

In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers. For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath we are dismayed.

[1:13] You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our years to an end like a sigh.

The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80, and yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? So, teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Return, O Lord. How long? Have pity on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

[2:24] Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you so much for your love for us. We know ourselves at least well enough to marvel at your love for us.

And you know us even better than we know ourselves. And yet, you have loved us, and you continue to love us, and you have promised that you will never stop loving us.

And so we thank you. We pray this morning that you would speak. Father, I pray that you would help me to minister your word for your people.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I don't know what it's like for you as you think about the days ahead.

[3:40] And when I say the days ahead, I have in mind both your days ahead as a church, but also, maybe especially, your days ahead personally, each one of us.

For some, as you look ahead, it might seem like a fairly pleasant path, at least as far as you can see. For some, the days ahead might look kind of bleak, unpromising.

For some, it might look like an obstacle course, maybe a very challenging obstacle course, one filled with all kinds of barriers, some of them daunting barriers.

But the fact of the matter is, for all of us, we are walking forward into the days ahead, and that walking forward is going to require some courage, some going forth in faith.

And to help us with that, I want us to consider this psalm this morning. It is a psalm of remarkable wisdom. This is ancient wisdom.

[4:42] This is the oldest psalm that we have. Most of the psalms, as you probably know, were written by David or by his contemporaries. This one was written by Moses some 500 years earlier than David.

And as we look at this psalm this morning, I want to make just two very simple points. The first point is what occupies verses 1 through 12. The second point is found in verse 12 to the end of the psalm.

In fact, let me just tell you right away what the points are. The first point, life is short. Like really short. The second point, live wisely.

Or we might say, make sure not to waste your short life. or any part of it. Teach us, Moses says in verse 12, all of us, no matter what your age, teach us to get a heart of wisdom.

That's the second point. But first, point number one, life is short. Moses starts his psalm talking to God about what He is like.

[5:48] Look at verse 1. Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. We read that and we're immediately drawn to this dwelling place idea, right? Lord, You have been our dwelling place.

That sounds really nice, comfortable, attractive, kind of secure, especially if the circumstances of our lives have been a little challenging. And it's true what Moses says here.

God is the true dwelling place of His people. We live in God. The Bible wants us to know that, deeply know that, experientially know that about God.

But for Moses, speaking here, that is like a given. He's operating with that as a given. What he's stressing here is that in all generations part.

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. For my generation, for my father's generation, for my father's father's generation, as far back as we can reach, and that will be true for all of the generations to come.

[6:51] You see, Moses is not here in Psalm 90 marveling at the fact that God is our dwelling place. He knows that. He loves that as He should, as we should. But that's not what he's marveling at here.

He's marveling at God's unchangeableness. His eternal unchangeableness. And that becomes even more clear in verse 2. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Now, it's really important that we see that emphasis. What exactly about God Moses is emphasizing, but it's also very important that we see Moses' purpose.

Why is he emphasizing that? Because even though Moses is stressing the eternity, the unchangeableness of God, his purpose is actually to confront us with our mortality.

He's emphasizing God's eternity to heighten that in stark contrast. Just listen to the flow of thought here. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

[8:00] Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God, you return man to dust. You hear that contrast?

And now in verses four through six, he proceeds to unpack that point, which really is his main point. Look at what he says in verse four. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past or as a watch in the night.

The point there in verse four is that even if we were to live a thousand years, even if you were to live as long as Methuselah, still that is just like a day in God's sight.

In fact, not even that long. It's like a watch in the night, a mere four hour span of time, even if you lived a thousand years. And the fact is we don't live anywhere near that. Look ahead to verse 10.

The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength, 80. Obviously, some people live longer but not much. I mean, we get the point, right?

[9:03] We are not everlasting. We are mortal. Our lives are really brief and then we return physically to dust. He goes on in verses five and six and says to God, you sweep them away as with a flood.

They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning, it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening, it fades and withers. What's the point of all of those images in verses five and six?

Life is really short. The Bible says that repeatedly so that we cannot miss it, at least if we're paying attention. In fact, let me just give you a little quiz this morning.

You know those questions where they give you a list of apparently unrelated things and your job is to find out what all of those things have in common. You've got to kind of figure it out.

Let me give you a question like that this morning. What do these things that I'm about to list have in common? You ready? Mist, the width of your hand, a weaver's shuttle, a runner, a boat going down a river, an eagle swooping on its prey, a dream, and a plant that flourishes in the morning and withers in the evening.

[10:21] What do all of those have in common? Well, I'm pretty sure you either know or can make a pretty good guess. Those are all images that the Bible uses to communicate the brevity of our lives.

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. James chapter 4. Behold, you have made my days a few hand breaths.

Psalms 39. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Job 7. My days are swifter than a runner. They flee away. They go like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey.

Job chapter 9. You sweep them away as with a flood. They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed.

In the evening it fades and withers. Psalm 90. The point is clear, right? Life goes by very quickly. It's not very long.

[11:21] And not many of us would argue the point, right? I mean, you feel this. You feel it more as life passes. I am 57 years old.

In three years I'll be 60. Which right now, to be honest with you, just feels kind of cool to me. But the thing that can throw me is that in 13 brief years I'll be 70.

And that can throw me a bit. Because that's the number that gets named here. 70 years or by reason of strength, 80.

When I was 20 it was just unfathomable to me that I would ever be 70 years old. Now obviously I knew that as a fact but it didn't register at all anywhere.

I couldn't imagine that. Actually, I wasn't so much that I couldn't imagine it. I wasn't even trying to imagine it. I wasn't even thinking about trying to imagine it. It was far from my concerns and now I'm 57 and I'm thinking about it.

[12:29] Or to put it differently, all things being equal, I've lived two-thirds of my life. All things equal, I've got just one-third left. I'm not panicking. It's just like, wow, where did it go?

So let's bring this home a little bit to you. If you're in your 50s or 60s you're probably already tracking with me.

But let's say you're in your 40s or your 30s or let's say you're in your 20s. Let's just say you're 25. All things equal, you have lived close to one-third of your life and you should know by the way the second third goes by a whole lot faster. So it's not too soon to come to terms with this reality that God's Word is setting before us.

In fact, it's good to come to terms with this younger than that. One of my children reminded me recently of a time when they were maybe eight or nine years old that I had, apparently, as matter-of-factly as I could at the kitchen table, said to them, there's my three children there, and I said, you know you're going to die someday.

[13:35] Great parenting, right? And this particular child, just like a month ago, told me that she remembered that and that as an eight or nine-year-old, that struck her.

She hadn't realized that yet, and something registered for her. Now, you might be sitting there thinking this morning, man, why are you laboring this point? I come to church to get encouraged. And part of me wants to say sorry, but the wiser part of me wants to very quickly say, no, I'm not sorry at all. It's really important we think about this. Now, I learned in my church history classes way back when I was in seminary that certain medieval theologians would regularly place a human skull on the shelf above where they were studying so that it would remind them of the brevity of their lives.

In our own history as a culture, as a country, it was common practice to tell about 70 or 80 years ago for a church to have a graveyard right next to the church building so that every Sunday there

would be a regular reminder of this truth.

Listen, God's word is very clear here. Life is short. We will die. And actually, that raises a very interesting, philosophical, kind of existential question.

[14:59] Why? Because somehow the brevity of our lives, our mortality, just doesn't feel right. We resist it. There's something in us that is not easily resolved with that reality.

Why is death so hard? Why is there death? Why is life so short? Well, verses 7 through 11 tell us. They answer that question. I just want you to know these verses are not easy.

They're not easy to understand, but then once you understand them, they're not easy to accept. Good verses 7 through 11. For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath, we are dismayed.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins, in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80, yet their span is but toil and trouble.

They are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? Listen. Verses 7, 9, and 11 give us an explanation for the shortness of life.

[16:08] Now let's be very careful here. These verses are easy to misunderstand. When verse 7 says, we are brought to an end by your anger, that is not talking about some kind of event of God's active anger directed toward me during my life like some kind of malevolent deity striking me dead.

That is talking about a decision, a judgment that God made in his righteousness, the result of which is our mortality and the brevity of our lives. There was a little clue to this back in verse 3.

Look there. You return man to dust and you say, return, O children of man. Does that remind you of anything? Turn back just for a moment to Genesis chapter 3.

You remember after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God came and he pronounced a curse and part of that curse to Adam are these words. Genesis 3 verse 19, by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

In Psalm 90, Moses is very clearly alluding to Genesis chapter 3 which he wrote by the way. He would be very familiar with those words.

[17:31] And do you see that phrase back in Psalm 90 verse 3, O children of man? Do you know what the Hebrew word for man is there? Adam. Adam.

So Moses is very clearly alluding to Genesis chapter 3 and he has his mind on the curse, that righteous judgment that God made on Adam for his sin and we see that echoed in verse 10.

The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80, yet their span is but toil and trouble. There's the language of God's righteous judgment again in response to man's sin.

That's why that reference to our sin in verse 8. You have set our iniquities before you. Our secret sins in the light of your presence. Do you see how that explains verses 7 and 9?

For we are brought to an end by your anger. All our days pass away under your wrath. Our mortality and the shortness of our lives is a result of God's judgment as a consequence of our sin.

[18:33] And that also explains that question in verse 11. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? In other words, Moses is saying, who thinks about this?

Who makes that connection? You know, in all of my years I've never once had an unbeliever come up to me and say, you know, I'm really experiencing the wrath of God today as my life hastens towards its end.

And yet that's exactly what's happening. The Apostle Paul says very clearly, the wrath of God is being revealed against all unrighteousness and a major part of that wrath being revealed is the brevity of our lives.

The shortness of our lives. People don't typically think of the relationship between their mortality and God's sovereign power and His judgment. Most people are too busy living for the moment to think about that.

Who considers the power of your anger according to the fear of you? Our mortality and the shortness of our life is the result of God's just judgment on the human race due to our sin and it puts us in this place of dismay.

[19:42] Did you see that in verse 7? We are dismayed. We think and we feel regarding the shortness of our lives, oh, how I wish it wasn't this way.

So, point number one, life is short. That's not the way it was originally meant to be and we feel that. However, all is not lost.

Verse 12. So, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. So, here's the second point.

Live this short life wisely. Wisely. Live your short life wisely. First part of verse 12 is simply reemphasizing the point that Moses has already made.

Teach us to number our days. Teach us to recognize that our days are, in fact, numbered. Help us to realize that. That's the main thing that Moses is teaching in verses 1 through 11 and here is, at the start of verse 12, he's simply asking God to help us get that point.

[20:49] Teach us to number our days. That's the main truth so far. But even in that restatement, Moses is beginning, I believe, to suggest what the rest of verse 12 says explicitly so that we might get a heart of wisdom.

Point number two, we want to live our short lives wisely. Life is short and everything, everything is at stake in this short life.

Your life is like this, folks. It's gone. And that makes you, when you realize that, it makes you ask, why am I here? What is my life for?

How should I live my life? And that calls for wisdom. The place God wants us to go with that reality is to wisdom.

Teach us to number our days so that we might get a heart of wisdom. Now please notice, it's not, life is short, so party hard, man.

[21:55] And it's not, life is short, so just give in to despair. And it's not, life is short, so get as much stuff as you can or get all of the adventurous experiences that you can.

You know that company that started the stand-up paddleboard craze? You know these paddleboards that you stand up on? The company that started that, it's called YOLO.

You know what that stands for? Y-O-L-O? You only live once. I hate that. I mean, I really hate that. You only live once, life is short, so make sure to go paddleboarding. Or make sure to climb some mountain, or make sure to try this, or try that before your life is over.

I've actually suggested to my children that we should start up an alternative paddleboard company and name it YALT. Not Y-O-L-O, but Y-A-L-T, YALT, which stands for you actually live twice.

[23:04] One short life with a lot at stake, so don't be foolish and limit your life to adventures and experiences and accomplishments or cynicism.

And then a really long life called eternity. Two lives, the dot and the line. And Psalm 90 says, Moses says, I mean, this is ancient wisdom.

Teach us to number our days so that we might get a heart of wisdom. So that we might live this one short life well. Be fully prepared for eternity.

And the big question, of course, is how? How does that happen? What is living wisely? And the answer is right there in verse 14. And the rest of this psalm.

Listen, Psalm 90 verse 12 is not by any means talking about merely human wisdom. No, it's God's wisdom he's speaking of. This is being in right relationship with God, Him, being, our dwelling place.

[24:10] God's wisdom is true wisdom and it is found for us in only one place. Verse 14, satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love. So that we might rejoice.

and be glad all of our days. Listen, let's back up just a bit. Right at verse 13, something turns. I don't know if you noticed that when we were reading.

Something dramatically turns. While Moses is very aware of the situation that we live in, that he's been talking about in the first 11 or 12 verses, he also knows that that's not the end of the story.

There is something in him, something very strong in him that cries out, verse 13, return, O Lord,

how long have pity on your servants.

Translation, do something, God. Don't leave us in this situation. Have pity on us. In fact, he just continues on in that vein.

The rest of this psalm is a prayer with Moses pleading with God. I mean, you could take those words, O Lord, from verse 13 and just distribute them down to every verse from that point on. Verse 14, O Lord, satisfy us.

[25:20] O Lord, make us glad. Verse 15, verse 17, O Lord, let your favor be upon us. O Lord, do something to save us. And that is not just some desperate prayer in the dark.

Moses knows what he's asking for. He knows what he wants and he knows what he needs the Lord to do. It is best summarized there in verse 14.

In fact, this is one of the great summarizing verses of the Bible. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love so that we might rejoice and be glad all of our days.

That's what is needed. Now, the key thing there is that little two-word phrase, steadfast love. It's actually just one word in Hebrew and it's a beautiful word.

It's the word *hesed*. When I say beautiful, I don't necessarily mean beautiful sounding, although I'm sure after people understood what it meant. They came to love that word. Sometimes that word is translated into English by the word *mercy*, sometimes by *loving kindness*.

[26:25] You might see that in your Bible, but I think the better translation is this one, steadfast love. It speaks of God's eternal, unbreakable commitment to love his people.

Grounded in his being, in his character, in his heart, it speaks of his eternal and absolutely reliable love. Sometimes it is spoken of as his covenant love.

But the key idea is the love that flows out of his heart of love for his people. You see, despite the reality of his judgment, there is still this commitment of God to love his people.

And you see that, how critical that is to the thought of verse 14. And satisfy us with your steadfast love so that we can rejoice and be glad all of our days.

You can feel the weight of that, especially after what verses 1 through 12 have said. It's not just critical to the thought of verse 14. It's critical to our existence. We have been wrecked, just devastated by our sin and by God's judgment.

[27:34] Our lives are short and we sense that's not the way it's supposed to be. Our lives are filled with toil and trouble. And we sense that's not the way it's supposed to be and we live all of our days under the judgment of God with the reality of death always there whether we think about it or not.

So we cry out, O Lord, have pity. Rescue us. Bring us out of the hopelessness of all of that. Show some favor to us. Instead of dismaying us, satisfy us.

And we know what will do that. At least Moses knows. It's your love for us, O Lord. the expression of the demonstration of your deep-hearted commitment to love your people, your steadfast love.

That is the only thing that will cause a people who have been so devastated by sin and by your judgment to be rescued and therefore to be able to rejoice, in fact, to be glad all of our days.

The expression of the demonstration of God's heart of love, his purpose of love, his promise to love his people. Some time ago, a friend of mine shared this story from his own life.

[28:46] Now, admittedly, it wasn't the most dire of circumstances, but he felt it. And I think we can relate as we listen to this, and it serves wonderfully to illustrate the point that I'm trying to make from Psalm 90, verse 14.

Here's what he said. When I was going from high school to college, I was going to a university in a town I had never visited, a college I had never seen, and my father took me. We were driving from St. Louis to Chicago, driving up Highway 55, and I started out real excited, talkative, but the closer we got to the university, the more scared I got.

At some point, my father looked over to me and said, you're scared, aren't you? And I said, I am.

We were driving up Highway 55, we were in the cornfields of southern Illinois, and my father simply pulled off to the side of the road, stopped the car, turned off the engine, and he said, now, you look at me.

You are my son, and nothing is going to change that. I don't know if you will do well at that school. I don't know if you will do poorly, but my home is always your home.

I am your father, and nothing you do, nothing you fail to do is going to change that. I love you. You are mine. He goes on to say, did that take all the problems and struggles away?

[30:07] No, but it was a comfort, and it was security, and ultimately, it was strength. And then he makes this point. God says to his people, I love you, and you are mine.

I have loved you with an everlasting love, and I have called you with loving kindness. What you do did not get you into that relationship with me, and what you do will not get you out of that relationship with me.

You are mine. This is God's commitment to us. It is God's steadfast love for us, and I want to just come right out now and say it.

That steadfast love from God for his people is expressed. It is demonstrated. It is shown particularly in Jesus. The whole Old Testament anticipates it.

The New Testament celebrates it. It's there in his coming. It's there in his living a perfectly righteous life for us in our place.

[31:14] You know, we make so much of the fact that Jesus died in our place, and he did, but his life was in our place as well. He fulfilled all righteousness for us, and then, yes, he died in our place swallowing up the judgment of death so that those who run to him and trust in him, their lives are no longer defined by being under the judgment of God.

What a difference. What good news. God's judgment on us poured out on Christ in our place. God's mercy shown. God's steadfast love demonstrated, and because of that, instead of being under the sentence of death, we have life.

Listen, if God doesn't show his love for us, we're still in verse 7 and verse 9. We are brought to an end by your anger.

All our days pass away under your wrath. If God doesn't show his love for us, we're stuck in verse 10. And then, the terrifying prospect of eternity separated from God.

But now, because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. God's steadfast love.

[32:37] And instead of not giving any thought about these things like verse 11, now we say, verse 16, let your work.

That's speaking of God's salvation, his steadfast love shown in Christ. Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children.

Jesus is what we need. And living with wisdom in this short life is facing our need and then looking to God's steadfast love for us in Christ.

That's what we are able to be satisfied by. And I don't know that there is a greater statement of that in all the Bible than in the book of Romans, chapter 8.

Just listen to these incredible words. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

[33:45] It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

In Christ, in Jesus, the steadfast love of God, the eternal kindness of God for his people has come to us. And it is the ground we stand on to say, with David, as individual Christians, and, may I say, as a local gathering of believers.

It's that ground we stand on to say, satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all of our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord, our God, be upon you.

[34:57] and establish the work of your hands. Yes, establish the work of our hands. Even in this life, with all of its uncertainties and its ambiguities and its frustrations, even in this life with its struggles, there can be gladness in our days because of the steadfast love of God poured out in our lives in and through Jesus Christ, the King, to Him be glory.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your Spirit who takes it and brings it to us.

Thank You for Your church, gathering of believers. I pray that You would take Your Word and by Your Spirit bring it to us as Your people and give us strength.

Put faith in us. Help us to obey. Help us to persevere, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.