

October 19, 2025

TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

Psalm 90

(1 of 4 in a series of selected Psalms)

I've noted multiple times that the Psalter, the book of 150 psalms, wasn't put together haphazardly. It's not by mistake that the end of the Psalter ends with five psalms that each begin and end with a command to praise the Lord. They were put there intentionally to tell us where history is going. Not only that, but the 150 psalms are divided into five books where each ends with something like what we see at the end of Psalm 89, which marks the end of book 3, as the psalmist writes, "Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen" (Ps 89:52). This division of the Psalter in five books that parallel the five books of God's law provides additional evidence that much care was given to how the Psalter was arranged.

We see similar evidence of careful arrangement with the introductory psalms provided for us in Psalms 1-2. Psalm 1 focuses on God's law or Word. It tells us that the one who meditates on and walks according to God's Word is blessed. Then, Psalm 2 speaks of God's king. It focuses us on the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7 that he'd raise up one from his line who would be his promised and eternal king—whom we know is Jesus. And Psalm 2 tells us that the one who submits to God's promised and eternal king is blessed, just as Psalm 1 reminded us that the one who walks according to God's Word is blessed.

Therefore, in an ideal world, the structure of the psalms tells us that Israel should have been a people who faithfully obeyed God's Word as they eagerly waited for God to bring his promised and eternal king into the world. And yet we know that things did not play out this way. Rather, God's people constantly and consistently disobeyed his Word so that eventually God brought judgment on the people and led them into captivity. Jerusalem was destroyed, and there was no son of David reigning on the throne.

If you were an Israelite in that moment, you likely would have wondered, "What about God's promise to David?" Well, actually we don't have to imagine that they would think that way; we have record that they thought that way because we have Psalm 89. Psalm 89 is written by an Israelite who has witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem, and as he looks around, it looks like God has simply decided to abandon his promises, including his promise to have a son of David reigning over his kingdom. In fact, the psalmist says to the Lord that it looks like he's renounced his covenant, cast off his people, and removed his steadfast love. Everything looks like the opposite of how you would have anticipated it looking in light of God's glorious promise that he's providing a righteous, eternal king. And it's on that devastating note that book three of the Psalter ends.

Therefore, most every commentator acknowledges that as book four of the Psalter opens, God is providing in this fourth book his answer to the questions and complaints of book three, especially that of Psalm 89. What will God say in response to the charge that it looks like he's cast off his

people, removed his steadfast love, and renounced his covenant? And as book four opens, we (perhaps surprisingly) find an answer in a psalm written by Moses. In fact, it's the only psalm in the Psalter written by Moses.

So, why? Why would the one who arranged the Psalter decide to put this psalm of Moses right here at the beginning of book four as we're anticipating an answer to the questions of Psalm 89? Why would he provide an answer to the question, "What about your promised king?" by taking us to a time in Israel's history where the people had no king, to the time of Moses? Well, I think there are two reasons. First, it's actually fitting that we find in Psalm 90 a prayer of Moses because there was another time in Israel's history where it looked like the Lord was ready to cast off his people, and it was in Exodus 32, where they'd fashioned and worshiped the golden calf. And what happened after God said he'd destroy his people in that moment? Well, Moses interceded on their behalf. And now at this point in Israel's history where it looks like God has cast off his people, we once again find a prayer of Moses, asking God to show favor to his people.

But a second reason, I think, is because by taking us all the way back to Moses, hundreds of years earlier, the psalmist is pointing the reader back to realities that were true before any of tumultuous events of the present happened. In other words, by taking us back to the time of Moses, the psalmist is saying to us, "Don't forget what was true then because, despite what you see now, those things are still true." And so, I think that's what this psalm is doing. It reminds us of realities that are always true and shows us a path down which to go when we find ourselves in the midst of dark times, even times when people are questioning the promises of God. So, what does Psalm 90 teach us to do in dark times? I'll note four things. First, let God's eternal nature lead you to seek refuge in him.

Let God's eternal nature lead you to seek refuge in him

As Moses opens this psalm, he begins by addressing the Lord and his eternal nature. He writes, "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" (vv. 1-2).

Notice what Moses gives us here. I mean, if you were an Israelite looking at the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the hauling off of your king into captivity, you may be thinking, "We've lost everything that we've come to rest in and rely on. What will we do without our holy city, without the temple, without our king?" And Moses reminds us that we have a God who preceded all of these things. In fact, our God existed before the world itself was made because he is the eternal God. He's always been and always will be.

If an Israelite had just thought in that moment, he could've thought back to the Exodus. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, the Israelites had no temple, no city, and no king. But guess what they did have? They had their God. And he was a refuge for them. He delivered them out of the hands of the greatest superpower in the world at that time, drowned the Egyptian soldiers, and met the needs of his people. Therefore, if God cared for them then, why would

there be any need to panic now? If God was their refuge then, then it may feel like everything around them has been turned upside down and stripped away, but God hasn't changed.

That's the lesson of verses 1-2. It may be that events have taken place in your life that feel like it's turned your world upside down. And maybe it feels like all the things you found security in have been stripped away. But the reality is that all those things were simply a means God used to care for you. But he was the one who cared for you. In the times when you felt like everything was in place to give you security, God was your only true security then, and he was enough. And in those times where it feels like nothing is in place to give you security, God is your dwelling place, and he is enough. So, that's the first lesson for how to walk faithfully in dark times. Let the fact that God always has been and always will be lead you to seek refuge in him. When it feels like your whole world crumbles away, the everlasting God is still there, and he is still a faithful refuge for you. Second, let the fleeting nature of life direct you away from hope in temporary things.

Let the fleeting nature of life direct you away from hope in temporary things

As I mentioned, it was the destruction of Jerusalem that led the Israelites to lose hope, but the reality is that the destruction of Jerusalem is simply a representation of what will happen with everything in this world. Whether it's a magnificent city, structure, or person, eventually it's all just temporary. A generation comes and a generation goes, as Solomon reminds us. But Moses reminds us of this as well. In verses 3-6 he reminds us that the God who formed us from the dust will watch us all eventually return to dust. Our lives are like a watch of the night, like a dream that vanishes away as we wake up, and like grass that springs up overnight but is scorched and withers in the next day's sun.

Why is that helpful to know? Well, it's helpful because the temporary nature of what is around us should lead us not to put our hope in such temporary things but in the eternal one, who is our God. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:18 that we are not to "look to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

When things in this world vanish, fade away, and seemingly disappear from beneath your feet, let it be a reminder to you that your hope can never ultimately be in the things of this world. Rather, back to verses 1-2, put your hope in your eternal, unchanging God who is always there, will never leave you nor forsake you, and who is always trustworthy, true, and good. Let the fleeting nature of life direct you away from hope in temporary things. And third, let God's wrath toward sin lead you to a proper fear of God.

Let God's wrath toward sin lead you to a proper fear of God

In verses 7-11, as Moses continues to speak of the temporary nature of our lives, which are typically about 70-80 years (though they are exceptions on both sides), he not only recognizes the fleeting nature of our lives, but he recognizes the reality of sin and judgment. He notes that

“we are brought to an end by your anger” and “by your wrath are dismayed” (v. 7). He recognizes that God is aware of all our iniquities and that though our sins feel secret, they are known to God (v. 8). And he mentions that our days pass away under the wrath of God (v. 9). And all of this builds up to his declaration in verse 11 that man must consider divine anger with a proper fear of God.

But why? Why does he mention sin and God’s judgment as he reflects on the temporary, fleeting nature of our lives? Well, it may be because of what he is seeing around him. Remember that Moses led millions of Israelites in the wilderness whom God said would not enter the promised land but would die because of his judgment for their sin. I mean, imagine leading a group of people to whom the Lord said, “I’m going to have you all wander around in the wilderness and die before leading you into the promised land because you’ve rebelled against me.” Every day another Israelite (or several Israelites) died, and each time it was a reminder that life is brief and that the holy God doesn’t overlook sin. So, it was easy for Moses to be reminded of the connection between sin and death.

But the reality is that Moses wouldn’t have needed to witness Israelites dying all around him under the judgment of God in order to move to thoughts of sin and judgment as he recognized the fleeting nature of our lives because the reality is that the only reason death is in this world in the first place is because of sin and judgment. As Adam sinned, we know that in judgment, the Lord subjected the world to futility and corruption. This entire world is marked by death and decay, and it has been since Genesis 3.

That’s why if the Lord tarries, we’ll all die. If we’re in Christ, death is no longer a penalty for us or a sign of our condemnation, but because we were born in Adam in this fallen world, we’re all still subject to the death and decay that characterizes this age. As Moses has already noted, it’s why our lives are quite brief, especially in comparison to our eternal God. So, I want to encourage us not to waste what the reality of death and decay remind us of in this world, namely, that God is a holy and just God who does not overlook sin. Allow that to build in you a right fear of God.

However, when I say that, I want to correct an area where I could be misunderstood here. I don’t think believers should live their lives in constant fear before God. He’s freed us from fear of death and condemnation. But that doesn’t mean that there is no place for the fear of God in our lives. When the author of Hebrews wrote to the believers receiving that letter who were tempted to walk away from Christ, he wrote to them, “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, *let us fear* lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (Heb 4:1). So, if a believer shouldn’t live in a state of fear before God, what does the author of Hebrews mean when he tells them to fear that they might not enter God’s promised rest for his children?

I think John Piper has given the best illustration to answer this. He tells us to imagine a boy who grabs a ball and heads out into the backyard to play. As he walks out the door, his mom says to him, “Have fun, but make sure you don’t go toward the street out front because you could get hit by a car.” Well, as long as that boy is playing in the backyard, should his heart be gripped with fear? Absolutely not. Just enjoy kicking the ball, throwing it, and having fun without an ounce of

fear creeping into his mind. But, the second that he hits that ball into the street and feels the impulse to chase after it, fear needs to grip his heart.

That's how the fear of God should function in the life of the believer. We live our lives enjoying our Lord, knowing he approves of us and delights in us because of the work of Jesus Christ. What a privileged position we have before him, and that should lead us to live our lives with great joy. But the second we feel the impulse to defy him and sin, fear should grip our hearts. We must have more fear of God than to trifle with sin.

Therefore, this third section of the psalm gives us more instruction on how to live when it feels like our world has been turned upside down. We let God's eternal nature lead us to hope in him. We let the temporary nature of this world lead us away from hoping in these seen and transient things. And we let the reality of God's wrath that we see imprinted on this cursed world, manifested in the death we see all around us, lead us to walk with a proper fear of God. Then, as we look at verses 12-17 we see that we must let God's grace and love us lead us to seek his mercy and help.

Let God's grace and love lead you to ask for his mercy and help

In verses 12-17 Moses comes to the portion of his prayer where he makes requests. Every verse that ends this psalm reveals Moses asking God to do something. He wants God to teach, return, have pity, satisfy, make us glad, let his work be shown, and establish the work of our hands. To sum it up, Moses recognizes God's grace and love, and he allows that to move him to seek God's mercy and help.

Specifically note what Moses asks for. He first asks God to teach us to number our days so that we might get a heart of wisdom (v. 12). In other words, because life is fleeting, we should make the most of our time and live wisely. But Moses recognizes that we don't do that naturally. We're prone to live life quite unintentionally, and so he asks God to help us to do that. He, in essence, says, "God help me to live well."

In verse 13 he asks for pity. Moses writes as one who recognizes the sin of those around him and himself. But he also knows that God is a God who abounds in steadfast love and forgives sins. That's how God had revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7, and so he asks for mercy.

Then, in verse 14, he asks God to satisfy us in the morning with his steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. This, brothers and sisters, is a key to fighting sin. So often when we sin, we try simply to focus on the sin when we want to turn from it. We know that it only offers fleeting pleasures, and we want to repent. Well, recognizing that sin only offers fleeting pleasures and turning from it is good, but it's not sufficient. The fight of holiness always has two components—fasting and feasting. Yes, put away sin and its fleeting pleasures. But we don't think try to sit in neutral. We turn to a greater, lasting pleasure. We start each day seeking to know the pleasures that are at God's right hand forevermore. We ask him, as Moses does here,

to satisfy our hearts with his love, to recognize God's love for us and be overjoyed in him. That's our goal each day. And we need God's help in it, so ask for his mercy and grace.

Finally, in verses 16-17, Moses asks God to show his might and power to his people, showing them favor in establishing the work of our hands. Now, that's interesting, isn't it? Why would Moses, after noting the fleeting nature of our lives, ask the Lord to establish the work of our hands? Doesn't that assume that Moses is fighting against what he's already noted we should recognize—life's fleeting nature?

Perhaps, but it's really just asking the Lord to do what we can't. For example, all of us who make up Cornerstone Community Church will be dead and gone, eventually. Some might live long lives, so let's fast-forward a hundred years, and I trust that is far enough away for all of us to be dead (if the Lord delays his return). Again, life is fleeting. However, one thing we can do is to ask the Lord in his mercy to establish the work of our hands so that in the generations that arise 120 years from now, Cornerstone is still committed to Scripture, to seeing churches planting, to evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching others to obey all that Christ commands. In other words, we can ask the Lord to establish the work of our hands in as much as this would be pleasing and honoring to him so that this good work outlasts us.

But, putting this together, I think you can see that because Moses knows the gracious nature of his Lord who shows steadfast love to his people, he is not hesitant to ask the Lord for his mercy and help in giving him everything he needs to live a God-honoring life. And we must do the same.

Now, let me note one other thing as we close. Let us never lose sight of the gospel.

Let God's holy love lead you to never lose sight of the gospel

When you read verses 7-11 about God's wrath bringing our lives to an end and his wrath sweeping them away, it's it odd to think about what Moses writes in verse 1 when he says that God has been our dwelling place in all generations? How can these things both be true? Well, amazingly, the answer is that the just and holy God whose wrath was justly against us because of our sin sent his Son to bear his wrath for us. In other words, God gave himself (in his Son) to satisfy his own justice. And because of that, the one before whom we'll stand in judgment is the same one who has made himself our refuge because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection for us. And so, as we fix our hope on the eternal God, turn our hope away from this passing world, live with a proper fear of God, and ask God for his mercy and help, let us make sure that each day we keep the gospel ever before us. We must never lose sight of this good news. Let's remember it now as we come to the table. Amen.