**How to Both Live and Finish Life Well** (Psalm 90)

Dr Tom Horn, Crossroads International Church, November 17, 2019

**Introduction:** On April 12 (just over 7 months ago) a woman we know well went into the hospital for exploratory surgery because of having found blood in her urine and having some abdominal pain. The results soon showed that she had stage 4 bladder cancer. In a moment her life and that of family and friends dramatically changed. Impending death took on a new perspective. It was George Bernard Shaw, a famous Irish playwright, who has been quoted as saying, “The statistics on death are quite impressive: One out of one people die.”

Whether our pain and sorrow comes from relationships, financial hardship, medical problems, or an awakening of the reality of death, all people must deal with the stark reality that life on earth is hard. Some people escape hardship for a time but all people are faced with difficulties at some point. There are few people who have faced the reality of hardship and sadness day after day for as long as one man we learn about in the Bible. One man who lived more than 80 years with constant pain can teach us much about a proper perspective for life. This man is Moses.

Please turn in your Bibles with me to Psalm 90 and may God Himself teach us wisdom for how to live well so we can enjoy life now and eventually finish life well. READ

A message that is clearly taught from Psalm 90 is that of Perspective. In this Psalm we learn a Perspective on Time (1-6); on Life (7-10); on Time of Life (11-16); and on Time after Life (17).

By way of background, here is the context from which Moses wrote this Psalm. His life can be seen in three 40 year phases: life in Egypt raised as a prince in Pharaoh’s family; life in Midian as an obscure shepherd; and life leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt to the promised land. Although his first season of life was probably as pain free as possible, from that point on he had mostly difficult challenges and sad experiences. He was acquainted with much grief and pain.

It is one thing to deal with the sudden onslaught of a bad situation, like our friend I just mentioned. The pain is very real and can go very deep. The news of a terminal illness or the death of a friend or family member; an accident that leaves one forever changed in lifestyle; an irreconcilable relationship or a financial disaster. These painful experiences are hard to deal with—hard but over time for most people the pain subsides and life goes on.

It is quite another thing to live with or in a chronically bad situation. It always touches my emotions deeply when I see a Downs Syndrome child or adult, knowing the long struggle parents have endured. For some, everyday they wake up to a similar challenge. It never seems to end. This is the kind of continual grief and pain that Moses experienced.

We learn in Number 1:45-46 that about 600,000 men over 20 years of age went through the Red Sea, rebelled in the desert, and died over 40 years because of their unbelief and rebellion. We can assume approximately the same number of women of similar age. In Numbers 14:26-35 we learn that all men 20 years and older would die. This means that close to 1.2 million men and women died during 40 years of wandering. When we divide 1.2 million people by 40 years we roughly arrive at 82 funerals a day. This is what Moses lived with for 40 years. Wow!

We know that one death brings pain to many surrounding people not to mention the implications of caring for the survivors. If anyone had to live life with a perspective of judgment and death, it was Moses—40 years shepherding sheep and 40 years leading the stubborn nation through the wilderness. The tone of Ps 90, however, does not seem to be pessimistic but points to having a realistic perspective in the midst of mortality. Moses ends with an amazingly optimistic perspective for the future.

In the title we learn that this Psalm is “a prayer of Moses the man of God.” Before getting into the verses it would be negligent to skip notice that this Psalm is first a prayer. It was originally a prayer for the people of Israel and it can be a prayer for us today. Second, Moses is mentioned as a man of God. Prayer and godliness are inseparable. Godly men and women will pray, and wise men and women will pray much. Let’s look to see what he taught the nation of Israel and wants to teach us. PRAY

The Main Idea we will explore is this: *A proper perspective of God, sin, and time will enable one to live and die well.*

**1. Perspective on Time (1-6)**:

How do you view your time? Is it something that seems endless and you are oblivious to the hours of your day? Are you conscious that each day and hour is a gift to enjoy and glorify God? Or do you just not think about time? I can assure you that now that I am in my 60s I am more aware that my time on earth is getting shorter. How should I then live?

Vs 1-2 Remember that Moses and the many people were without a place to call home. They were wanderers. We all have a strong need for security and stability. But what is really secure and stable? Not a home or a bank account that can deteriorate before our eyes. Moses knew that what people need most of all is a perspective on what does not change. So, the initial focus is on God—the Person who never changes. He will always be there for His creation.

Consider a few choice words he uses:

*Generations*: Moses knew about generations and wrote about them in the genealogies of Adam in Gen 5. This word really means ‘successive generation.’ Saying *has been* provides perspective over millennia.

*Everlasting*: Israel’s security is linked to God’s eternal existence. It is never ending.

*Give birth or formed*: Ref to Gen 1-2; means writhe with pain. Make no mistake, these two verses and many others attribute creation to God. How God created is debated but it should not be debated that God is the creator.

*Dwelling place*: this is a place of security. Moses wants us to grasp that our security and stability is as sure as the everlasting God we believe in and serve.

Vs 3. Continuing his prayer on the proper perspective toward time, Moses says:

*Return to dust* (imperative): *earth* is the same word as Adam. Likely reference to creation, sin, death (ref to Gen 3). Yes, all people will die but what then? This could also be a reference of God leading mankind to repentance. Falling on one's face in dust is a sign of repentance.

Perhaps to ease the pain or to reconcile an inability to believe the Bible, people say that at death one ceases to exist. As a Bible believing follower of Jesus, that conclusion is not an option. Jesus came to earth to save sinful men and women from an eternity apart from God. Death is obvious but what comes after death depends on what we believe about Jesus.

Vs 4. Next we have a fascinating verse about perspective:

*Thousand years*: (1 Pt 3:8) God’s perspective on time is vastly different from ours. The longest life span, Methuselah, was almost 1000 years. We cannot even grasp what happens in 100 years let alone 1000 years. From God’s perspective a lifetime happens in a flash, like yesterday.

Realizing that we as human beings will live for eternity should motivate us that our brief time on earth prepares us for the longer reality after death. Most people wisely prepare income for the retirement years but how well do we prepare for eternity?

Vs 5-6. Before ending the reflection on a perspective of time Moses uses one more metaphor:

*Flood*: In Colorado this past winter we had so much snow in the mountains that late spring and summer river water flow was at flash flood levels and speed. Several people died. A branch floating in the water passes by in a blink. That is how shortly we exist. This is probably a Ref to Gen 6-7 and the great flood of Noah’s time as judgment.

*Grass*: A picture of a father and young son looking at a flower along with the verse Isaiah 40:8 is on the wall in my home office. I want to be constantly reminded of the brevity of life. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”

Application: Apart from a rock solid conviction of God’s eternal perspective, life on earth has little meaning. We are here today and gone tomorrow. But in this blink of an eye we call life, we can live well and leave a legacy as we will see by the end of the Psalm.

**2. Perspective on Life (7-11):**

After anchoring this prayer in the eternal existence of God, which is the only perspective that is sure, Moses addresses some truth about mankind. Why is life so brief?

Vs 7. Because of the ravaging effect of sin and how God's character demands a just response, death is actually the kind consequence that God provided. Death releases us from this life.

*We*: Moses turns his prayer very personal, including himself as under God's anger and wrath.

*End*: or consumed refers to death.

*Dismayed*: implies worry and associated with harm of death.

Vs 8. The cause of anger and wrath are next addressed.

*Iniquity* and sin: needs to be recognized for what it really is, not hidden. Our response to specific sin will indicate our spiritual maturity. It should cause us deep grief. We need people with whom we can share our sin to pray for us and help us change. We do not like hearing about our sinfulness and the consequential suffering. However, this is reality for all people. Life is brief due to our specific sin and judgment results.

Vs 9. Only one person never lived under God's wrath, because He never sinned—Jesus. Everyone else, even the most righteous people, live under the pending judgment of God's wrath. His perfection requires that sin be punished. Death is the most obvious result of sin.

*Sigh*: For most people in the world, living is hard. Days have some joy but also sorrow. For what do we sigh? What do we see repetitively that weighs us down, makes us moan, is just outright bad? Chronic disappointment and pain is very wearying. Over what do you sigh?

Vs 10. *Seventy or eighty years* have been the normal life span for millennia. Only recently have people been living past 100. In fact, statistics would lead me to believe that apart from some accident I should live into my 90s. Yet even our best years are marred. Whatever reason we have for pride (health, wealth, honor) passes quickly.

*Strength*: even added days are but more labor and sorrow. Seeing how so many people suffer in older age and how world events are going makes one seriously consider whether living long is a good thing. What do you think about aging and how long do you hope to live?

Vs 11. In light of the span of life, we do well to reflect on how to live.

*Who understands*: Many seem to avoid or minimize the fact that God hates sin. Whether it is the generally agreed upon horrors such as Aids, Abortion, Child Prostitution, and the like, or lesser horrors of political and social injustice, God’s wrath and fury is the same. To begin to sense God’s anger and wrath over sin enables the potential of the next verse being realized.

Many have concluded that if God punishes sin then He cannot be good. After all, He allowed evil and sin to come into existence. But once someone concludes that God cannot be good it is a short step to abandoning Him or never allowing his wonderful love to be embraced. Be very careful of attributing the evils of society and the abuses we see near us to God's direct or indirect involvement. He is sovereign, able to do anything, yet He does not sin or direct it. In the Epistle of James and chapter 1 he addresses this very question. God is not the author of sin.

**3. Perspective on our Time of Life (12-16):**

After praying over the sobering facts of time and life, Moses transitions to the only perspective worth holding. The best way to live in light of such sadness and eventual death is by humbly seeking to know God and His ways. These next verses are a series of hopeful commands.

Vs 12: Note, this verse focuses on the present rather than past of future or future.

*Teach us*: this imperative/command is the prayer of a motivated learner. Unless we are serious about living our remaining days well we will just give up. Today is the day we must focus upon.

*Present*: to offer, same word as in Gen 4:3-4 of the offerings of Cain and Abel. Each day we can offer to God our best thoughts, words, and actions.

*Wisdom*: the ability to live on earth with eternity in mind and heart. Wisdom is the theme of Proverbs. Wise living benefits us, blesses others, and brings pleasure to God. Even though we are all under His anger and wrath and eventual judgment, we can choose to show Him our love by our faith and obedience. In this way we get wisdom.

Consider this: If we had to buy time, would there be any difference in how we would spend it? Would the days of our lives be used more wisely? What if you had to pay in advance $15 an hour for the time allotted to you? Would you waste it? The answer should be obvious. Being mindful of how we live our days is very wise. This is a verse worth memorizing!

Vs 13. How do we live humbly? The next two words are also commands. Moses is desperate and asks God to be near and to be moved to action.

*Relent* (return) and *Be Sorry* (pity): Living wisely can only happen with God's enabling.

*How long*: this question is asked every day by millions; even creation groans. Have pity!

Perhaps you are at some desperate place where you need God's presence and mercy. He hears and He will answer in His best time and way. We need to ask and keep on asking. By doing so we show Him that our hearts desire is more than a trivial request. For what do you ask God desperately about? How long have you been doing so? Don't give up.

Vs 14. *Restore* (satisfy) is another imperative. There is hunger in this request.

*Early* (in the morning) is to have the needed hope for a given day. Each day we must ask.

*Loving-kindness*-Hesed (steadfast love): This is one of the most beautiful words in the Bible. It speaks of God's faithfulness to His people even though we often disobey and go astray. He will ever be near and His affections for us in our humble estate remains. Dt 7:8-10 chosen out of love.

Vs 15. *Reward* (make glad) This imperative requests proportional blessing (Job). Seemingly never ending hardships make profound peace and joy possible. The people I most admire are those who have suffered greatly and still find meaning and joy in living. They often have sweetness and peace about them that just doesn't seem possible.

Vs 16. This Psalm of Moses began with truth about God. He is eternal and omnipotent. He worked in the past and is still at work. So he asks for perspective.

*Reveal*: Our hope for the future is linked to our ability to see what God is doing in our time and in our context. This will give us the ongoing motivation to love and serve Him.

*Servants*: proper understanding in relation to God. Moses was honored to be called the servant of God (Dt 34:5). God commits Himself in a special way to those of us who believe in His son Jesus. We are servants and friends and an intimate part of His family.

*Children* speaks of generations. Most father’s will sacrifice much for a better future for children. Recently I have been asking Him to show Himself and His mighty work to me and those I love in unmistakable ways. We need reminders of God at work around us so we can boldly testify.

**4. Perspective on Time after Life (17):**

Vs 17 Moses' final prayer does not focus on the future location of a dwelling place but on the privilege of legacy. After all, our time on earth is very short from the perspective of eternity. Solomon noted that God placed a sense of eternity in the hearts of mankind (Eccl 3:11). All people everywhere want two basic things in life: to be happy and to make some difference. Of the two, and at the end of one's life, making a difference is more important.

*Favor* (delightfulness, beauty): Moses requests that the sum of God's gracious acts be illustrated in us and for His favor on what we give our life to do. Favor leads to satisfaction and permanence, whereas anger in verse 7 leads to misery and shortness. Again, Moses is asking God for mercy and grace rather than the judgment we deserve.

*Satisfy*: often used of having had enough to drink or eat; body needs return; satisfaction is short lived. Deep satisfaction can only come from living a life consistent with God’s perspective. Time is short so use it wisely. Life is to be enjoyed while helping others to enjoy it.

*Work*: what God has designed for us and equipped us to do. God works and we work. Work is precious not something to tolerate or avoid. How well aligned are you with your work?

*Confirm* (establish, make permanent, lasting). Here is the final imperative. Moses is desperate for himself and those who are God's children to live a life that has impact beyond themselves. We long to know that our efforts are producing good and when possible permanence.

**Conclusion:**

Is this prayer of Moses one of pessimism? Is it motivational? Is it an expression of realism? YES. Moses prays from his heart, his mind, his experience. How should you now think about your life in light of an eternal perspective? How should the reality of the brevity of your life influence your thinking and living in regard to use of time and view of sin? What decisions can you make to live wisely?

If in fact God is eternal as stated in verse one, and if He created man out of a longing to share eternal life with us, then we can safely conclude that He would provide a way for mankind to live with the tragic consequences of time and sin. We read in Romans 8:18-25 that all of creation groans for the future when all things will be made right—this includes people.

Where should our groaning lead us? Ask for wisdom (12), mercy (13), satisfaction (14), undeserved reward (15), and a vision of God at work (16). Mostly, desire and labor to leave a legacy (17). Only two things according to the Bible have permanence: God’s word and people. Chose to invest your brief time on earth in knowing God, His word and blessing people.

In his last recorded speech, Moses summarized how to best live life in one sentence this way (Dt 10:12-13), “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

Just over seven months ago a dear friend of age 60 was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. She has sought and followed the best advice. She has endured much discomfort, hours of flying, waiting in hotels and hospitals. Yet, when you read her Caring Bridge website (a place where she can communicate to many interested people easily) you see a woman growing stronger in faith and with radiant joy as she deals with bad stuff. She is leaving a legacy of faith and hope to her family and friends. Moses would applaud her!

Let us take a moment to reflect on the time and the life that we have. How should our perspective be guided by this prayer of Moses? What specifically can we do to live more wisely? Let us take a minute of silence and then we will close in prayer.

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