

The Brevity and Urgency of Life

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Bible Verse: Psalm 90
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Some twenty years ago, I had a conversation that I've never forgotten, and I remember it like it happened yesterday. I was on a Grace to You cruise, that was part of my work responsibilities. It's good work if you can get it. I introduced myself to an older couple, and I found out that they were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on the cruise, after a lifetime of ministry in the Far East, and in an effort to be gracious, I thanked the man for his service to the Lord. But the conversation didn't go like I thought it would. He quickly shook his head no and waved me off, and he said, in words that all have been seared in my memory, he said, "I went about it all wrong. I was gone most of the time when my teenage daughter needed me the most. Her life got really messed up. I would do it all differently if I had to do it over again." The worst part of that talk, I mean that was bad enough, the worst part of that talk was glancing over at his wife sitting across the table from him. She had her arms folded across her chest, showing no sympathy to him whatsoever. She only nodded in agreement with his self-condemnation. Somewhere along the line, that friend, that man who earnestly wanted to serve the Lord but went about it in the wrong way by his own testimony, somewhere along the line he lost perspective on what he was doing and by the time that he saw it, it was too late to fix.

I don't play golf anymore, a fact for which I give thanks to God, and I don't know much about it anymore, but I do know enough to know that some people play golf with a mulligan. If you hit a bad shot, you can take a mulligan, take the same shot over again, you swing again for a better shot without a penalty against your score. Great way to play golf, I guess. But beloved, what you and I need to understand deeply and to take deeply into account in the days, whatever days the Lord gives us left, is that life does not give you a mulligan. You don't get to do it over again if you mess it up and that concept makes an impact. Paul was joking about my age earlier, and that's fine. I'm not sensitive to those things at all. The truth of the matter is that the decades go by fast. I used to say the years go by fast, and everybody says that. At this point in life, I realize the decades go by fast. They just whiz by. And the truth of the matter is that life is brief and life is urgent and the question is, in light of that, how can we get it right so that we're not sitting somewhere talking to a stranger about having all of the regrets that that man had when I spoke to him?

Turn to Psalm 90 here this morning for our text. I'm going to read it, all 17 verses, with the urgent plea to God that he would spare you and spare me from regrets over how we

use the remaining days that we have going forward. This is a forward-looking message for all of us. Psalm 90 was written by Moses. The inscription says it was, "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God," and we read this, I'm reading out of the English Standard Version.

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. 3 You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!" 4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. 5 You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: 6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. 7 For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. 9 For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. 10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. 11 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? 12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. 13 Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants! 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. 16 Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. 17 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!

This is a text that I have preached many, many times, including here in Grace Life. The Lord, it seems, brings me to it about every three years: 2006, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2019, and now 2023; three of those occasions were on this campus. And beloved, I mention that not because anybody cares about the history of my pulpit, except for me, I guess, but I mention that because I want you to understand that this text is that important for the way that you approach life. It's important, and some of you know by direct personal experience what I am about to say, it is important because it is so easy to mess your life up and squander it by the pursuit of wrong priorities.

Some of you may remember Frank and Debbie Slater. When I left Grace Life back in 2011, I should preface it by saying this, I'll let you in on a secret here, but don't tell anybody. I'm actually a sentimental guy. I try to hide that as best as I can, but sometimes I can't. When I left Grace Life, Frank and Debbie Slater gave me a golf ball after hearing me preach on Psalm 90. It says, "Psalm 90, no mulligans." Thanks, the Slaters. A token of appreciation, I guess, of what that message meant to them back then, and I wanted to bring it with me just as a reminder to myself that these things really do matter.

What's going on in Psalm 90? In Psalm 90, Moses is meditating, you could say. He starts out with a meditation on the eternity of God and the certainty of his eternal purpose, and then he pivots to a polar opposite theme in his meditations as he contrasts the eternity of God with the brevity of life, and having thought through those things, it leads him into urgent prayer. And that's so important to see. He contemplates the eternity of God and yet realizes that there is human responsibility in the midst of the working out of the purposes of God, and as he feels the weight of that, he turns to God in urgent prayer, asking God for help, asking God for grace in the remaining days that he has that he wouldn't waste them, and that God would bring forth something of lasting value in his life.

He almost certainly wrote this near the final years, the final few months maybe of the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel. You remember that. The generation was judged and all of them except for two died over the course of 40 years as a judgment from God on their grumbling against him. So Moses is writing this from a perspective of having witnessed a lot of death, a lot of squandered opportunity from a human perspective, and now he comes to God in prayer and writes down words for us. And beloved, you need to understand and need to remember that what Scripture says in Romans 15:4, that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." This is a text that we are meant to read and understand but, beloved, not just read it, not just understand it, but as Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes clear so often in his preaching, you and I are meant to apply this. We are not here doing an academic lecture this morning. We are coming urgently to the word of God in light of the shortness of life and looking for that which would lead us on the path that would make our days well used in the short time that the Lord has given to us.

So I'm going to break this up into the three sections that the Psalm has, and the first section is this, if you're taking notes, you can just write down this little phrase: the eternity of God. The eternity of God. Moses draws on the eternity of God as he begins this meditation. Look at it there in verse 1. He says,

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Notice the plural, our dwelling place and in all generations. He's gathering in the scope of the history of the children of Abraham from that time and bringing it into bear as he contemplates the rule and the sovereignty of God, and he's connecting present-day Israel, contemporary Israel, with the people of faith that went before them. God had called Abraham some 2,000 years before the time of Christ and Moses is writing now 600 years later in roughly 400 BC, and you contemplate the passing of centuries, let alone decades, the passing of centuries, Moses looks back over the broad sweep of Israel's history to that point and says, "God, you have been our dwelling place. You have been the one who has kept and sustained us through all of the vicissitudes of our existence. You have loved us. You have kept us. You have been our source of safety. You have been the dwelling place for those people of faith."

And remembering that he's writing this in a very desolate place geographically, he's writing it in a desolate place in the history of Israel with all of their many failures, and what he's saying is, "God, you fulfill your purposes even when we do not see the evidence of it." There he is looking out over a barren desert, and by faith he says, "God, you fulfill your purposes. You are eternal in your being. You always accomplish your purpose even if it doesn't seem to be happening as we stand in the moment and look at things in the moment." Very critical to see, very critical to remember as we go through difficulties in life, to view things not as we see them today. We walk by faith, not by sight, and it is essential for us to always come back and anchor our view of life and our approach to our priorities, anchor them in the eternal purpose of God. He is sovereign. He is good. He is always accomplishing what he sets out to do because that lets us live life from a position of strength which is necessary when life doesn't go the way that we want it to do, when it brings us sorrow, when it brings us those times where you just break down in tears in the contemplation of the things that are heavy on your heart, and you just begin to sob as you contemplate it all. Some of you know that, don't you? You know it by experience. And our refuge in those times of sorrow is coming back to the eternal purpose of God.

And Moses goes on and says in verse 2, he moves beyond the people of God and contemplates and meditates briefly on the very nature of creation in verse 2. He says,

2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

He goes back to the very beginning second of creation, the very beginning second of the history of the world and the universe and he says, "God, long before that," he's casting his shadow into the pre-eternal nature of God, says, "long before creation, as we move into what existed in eternity past, you were God. Just as you are now, you were then. Just as you were then, you are now. And you always will be." I take refuge in that, beloved. I don't know about you. I hate change, and yet life is full of it, full of change. The anchor for those of you that share my aversion to change and like things to be the way they were yesterday, is to realize that in our God, in our Lord Jesus Christ, we have one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and we go to him in our times of joy, he's the same. We go to him in our times of temptation and having fallen into sin, he's the same. You go to him in our times of sorrow and weakness, physically, spiritually, he's the same. The same loving Lord over all, the Lord who saved you, the Lord who gave himself at Calvary to save sinners just like you, is the same today as he was when he was giving his life blood on the cross to redeem us from our sins. I love that. I love the fact that God is immutable, that he is unchanging, because it means there is an anchor as I go through life, as life changes all around me.

What Moses is saying here in the first two verses of Psalm 90 is that God had established his eternal purpose before time began and it is fixed and it is unchanging and God accomplishes his will without fail. He is victorious over every changing aspect of human existence. He established his purpose in eternity past. He is working out his purpose without fail in every detail of every existence in time. Ephesians 1 says that he works all things after the counsel of his own will. All things, beloved. It's a sweeping, magnificent

statement that we take refuge in, that whatever is happening, no matter how contrary, how painful it might seem in the moment, how difficult it might be, we always have an anchor to go back to and say, "Even in this, even when I don't see it, even when it hurts, even though it hurts bad, I don't understand, my God's working out his purpose and I can trust him for that." You live life differently when you have that perspective, and you and I are meant to be carried along by the current of God's purpose, not being tossed about by the waves of changing circumstances from day to day and month to month in our lives.

Beloved, take refuge in this: the hand of God is in everything that happens. His eternal purpose will prove to be good in the end. He works all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. I don't know about you, man, I need that today. I need that right now and I'm not being theatrical here. I'm just telling you the honest truth. God's purpose will prove to be good in the end, come what may, whatever's happening and so what this Psalm teaches us to do is to remember the eternity of God, embrace it and find our comfort in it, even if you're walking in a desert, even if you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me." The presence of God, the person of God is all that we need. We don't need anything else. When it's stripped down to everything else, if God is who Scripture says he is, that's enough, and if we are in Christ, that's enough and that is where our soul is ultimately supposed to find its refuge, not that things might get better tomorrow because they might get worse. We rest in the character, the purpose, the goodness, the greatness, the grace of God and find that which gives us our courage to live.

Now, so you must embrace the eternity of God, but by pointed contrast, Moses moves on in the meditation, and beginning in verse 3, he contemplates the brevity of life. The brevity of life. There is a great change in perspective from the first two verses to what follows beginning in verse 3. It's an amazing, striking contrast of great consequence. First two verses, a rock, the eternity of God, unmoving, unchanging, victoriously accomplishing his purpose no matter what. And then you pivot into verse 3 and you see something completely different as Moses reflects on the nature of human existence. Let's read verses 3 through 6 here. He says,

3 You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!" 4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. 5 You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: 6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

He's talking about the nature of human existence and we are so easily misled on this point as life seems the same from day to day to us. We urgently need to understand this perspective: God lives above it all. A thousand years to God, Moses is saying, he is indifferent to time, you could say. A thousand years to God is like a four-hour watch in the night. There's no difference in him. He lives beyond time. God is eternal but you and I, we're passing. We are transient. We're here today and gone tomorrow just like a flower that blooms up and looks great for a day and then the heat falls on it and it shrivels up and it's gone the next day. That beauty is passing and that's the way it is with us, beloved. The

beauty of our lives, the urgency of the things that we think are so important, our cares, our passion, our skin, it rises in the morning, falls at night.

Life, beloved, is just a waterfall cascading over the cliffs of time, rushing over, and you look down and it's gone. That's the reality of it and, my friends, my beloved friends here in Grace Life, this isn't a popular thing to contemplate. I know that these kinds of discussions make some people uncomfortable but until you have embraced this and understand it and calculated it into the way that you live, you're missing the purpose of life because you're wrapped up too much in what's happening in the here and now. We have to understand that it's rushing away from us because only then will we make an urgent effort to redeem the time, as Paul says in Ephesians.

Think about it this way, beloved. Those of you that know me may know that I love to go to cemeteries. I love to walk around in cemeteries, especially the Green Family Cemetery in Levitt Township that's now a retired place but my ancestors going back to my great-great-grandfather are buried there. And you go to a cemetery, if you're thinking about it rightly, if you go with the right perspective and not just rush through it or try to avoid it because it's an uncomfortable reminder of your own mortality, being in a cemetery has a very healthy effect, at least on me. In one sense, it doesn't even matter what the stone is that you're looking at. You look at a name, you look at a name that's etched in stone and the guy lived like my great-great-grandfather, three greats, lived 85 years. He was born in the 18th century in 1795. Lived 85 years. He was prominent in the community from what I can tell. But there he is. And you think about his life, living 85 years in his 30s, in his 40s, in his 50s, it looked like James Green was going to live on and on and on. And then the time came, the bell tolled, and that man who once seemed like he would never be away is gone. Seemed immortal almost for a time because of the longevity of his life. Now he's forgotten by almost everyone.

Beloved, I'm not being morbid here. I'm trying to help you with your life. I really am. I really am. However long you live, one day it's going to be your name that's on the plaque. One day it's going to be your name, it's going to be your remains that are being dealt with by your loved ones who are left behind. And that's what Moses is saying here. He says in the morning life flourishes and it's renewed. in the evening it fades and withers. The sun comes up and the sun goes down. And until we calculate that into the priorities that we make, we're going to choose the wrong things.

Now, why is our time short? Moses addresses that. Why is our time short? It's because God has judged the human race on account of sin. Look at verses 7 through 11 with me.

7 For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. 9 For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. 10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. 11 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

Now, as I said earlier, Moses was seeing this on the wilderness. If you do the calculations of how many people there were that entered into the wilderness and calculated over 40 years, there's an average of 50 to 75 people dying on a regular daily basis in that generation. That's a lot of death. That's a lot of shortness of life. That's a lot of constant painful reminders that they were under judgment for their sin. They were not going to see the Promised Land, God had made that plain to them, and every death, every death reminded them about their disobedience when they told God that they preferred going back to Egypt, back into slavery, rather than embracing the purpose that he had for bringing them out and carrying them through the Red Sea. They were being judged for their sin.

Let me say something to those of you that maybe are feeling the weight of the consequences of sin in your own life: broken relationships, squandered health, hopeless future, so it would seem. One of the reasons that God brought you into the room here today was to show you that there is a path forward. There is hope to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we have to come to grips with our sinfulness. We have to repent of those things. We have to repent of our very godlessness. You need to repent of the very fact that you have excluded Christ and excluded God from your whole consideration and approach to life. That's how you ended up in this situation, my friend. It wasn't pursuing the obedience to God that led you into that brokenness. We have to own up to our own responsibility. Confess that. Come to Christ for undeserved mercy. He's willing to give it. It was in love that he came. It was in love that he died. It was in love that he rose from the grave and in power. It's in love that he intercedes for his saints at the right hand of God. It's in love that he's going to come again. It's in love that he pleads with you through his word right now to come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. He's a merciful Savior, and isn't that what you need? "I need someone to save me, I've made a mess of things! O Lord, save me, would you? If you saved that imp in the pulpit, surely you would save me too."

These things matter and the urgency of recognizing your sin and the weight of conviction in a squandered life can still end in hope and glory for you by turning to Christ. He's willing to save you. You know what he said? He said, "It's not those who are well that need a physician but those who are sick." No well person goes to a doctor for serious medical treatment. That's not why a doctor exists. A doctor exists to help those who are ill. Jesus says, "I'm like a doctor that way." If you're content in your self-righteousness, I have nothing to say to you. You can go on your way, realizing it ends in perdition but for those of you with broken hearts and convinced of your sinfulness, Christ says, "I'm full of mercy." He says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls." My suffering, sin-infested friend, Christ is a Savior who will receive you, who will forgive you, who will cleanse you, and fit you for heaven. Why would you turn away from him? Why would you hear that and harden your heart against it, even if you've heard it a thousand times before? How about time 1001 becomes the time that you turn to Christ and repent and enter into the blessing of his kingdom?

You see, life brings sorrow. We get started and death takes us away. And you see, here's the thing, beloved, this is where it is so very difficult to enter into the spirit of this and imbibe it and embrace it in your heart in a way that changes the way that you live. This reality is unseen. We don't see it working out. And so you are deluded into a false sense of security that makes you think that tomorrow will necessarily be like today, only more so, and that next year you'll be here only more so, and on and on it goes. But eventually, beloved, time runs out. The sand goes through the hourglass and it's done. And until you embrace that and understand it and factor it into life, you've set yourself on the wrong trajectory and that's a grievous thing to contemplate.

You see, we cannot grasp this in our natural ability. Probably a majority of you don't like even hearing these things. You don't even want to hear it because it's so uncomfortable to contemplate but Scripture makes us contemplate it. You say, "Yeah, but not me. You know, I'm invincible. You don't know. You know, I work out. I take care of my health. And I rule over anybody that crosses my path." No, you don't rule over death. Death will have you in the end, beloved.

But it's our foolishness, it's our arrogance, it's our ignorance that causes us to not take these things into account and what Moses does, as you continue reading on in Psalm 90, is in light of the brevity of life that he had just expounded in verses 3 through 11, he ends this section in a prayer. He ends this in a prayer that I trust you will make your own as you're hearing this text, even in this moment. Moses prays in response to his meditation on the eternity of God and on the brevity of life and what are we to draw from that? He says in verse 12, he prays to God,

12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

He's saying, "Lord, pierce through, pierce through our false sense of security so that we would see clearly the brevity of life and use our days wisely rather than squander them away." The children of Israel, that generation, squandered their lives in disobedience to their God and they went out and they expired in the desert. What a waste. It's easy for you and I to look at that from a perspective 1,500 years later or actually 3,500 years later and say, "Man, those guys were so foolish." And yet, you know what? There's going to be people that look back on us and look at how we lived our lives, more importantly, the God who knows all things is going to look at us and search us at the day of judgment and say, "What did you do with the life I gave to you?" "Well, Lord, Lord, you know, I went out and made a lot of money." Okay, what does that have to do with anything? "Well, you know, we partied." Really? "I had some really good favorite shows that I watched that you should have seen, Lord." This doesn't seem to be going too well for me here. Yeah, it's not because life is not meant to be squandered on entertainment. It's not meant to be squandered on the mere pursuit of human passing wealth. It's certainly not meant to be squandered on a life of sin and disobedience to God. The chief purpose of man, the purpose of man, the reason that you exist is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Where is that priority of godliness factored into your life? The urgency of knowing him, of loving him, of knowing his word, of serving his word, of serving his people, where is

that in your pursuit of wealth, your pursuit of entertainment, your pursuit of sports and on it goes?

Look, it's not like I don't have my own regrets over those kinds of things. That's why I can speak about it. I know it by experience. What you and I have to do, beloved, what you and I have to do is realize in an Ecclesiastes sense the vanity and the foolishness of all of that and realize, as it says at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, I'm going to paraphrase here, that what matters is, the only thing that matters is fearing God and keeping his commandments for that applies to every man. I ask this as your friend. I ask this as one seeking the well-being of your eternal soul, beloved, honestly, where have you factored those kinds of things into the way that you approach life?

Moses understands that we would not do this if we were left to our own devices, so he says, "God, give us...intervene supernaturally in our thought process. Help us to understand the brevity of life so that we would number our days and say, you know what, this is short. I need to get with it and thereby manifest wisdom," perhaps for the first time in life. Let me give you an example, an illustration that changed the trajectory of my life many, many years ago, decades ago. I've said this before. Some of you may remember it. Periodically, you face decisions that have life-altering consequences: marriage, where you're going to go to school, which job you're going to take, are you going to move, which church you're going to attend. That's a big one. What teachers you're going to follow, whatever it is. You're making these decisions that set a trajectory for everything else that's going to come, especially for those of you that are young and are on the front end of it, maybe some of you, you're in your early seminary years and you're contemplating ministry. Be careful. Be careful about going into ministry. When you're on the front end of those life-altering decisions, here's what I encourage you to do. It changed my life to have this picture in my mind. Picture yourself at the end of your life. You're 70, 75, 80, and you're sitting in a rocking chair on a front porch someplace, rocking back and forth, looking out maybe over a nice view, over a green valley, mountains in the background, and you're reflecting on life that you look back on. You're an old man now, an old woman, and you're profoundly aware of the fact that you don't get to do it over again. The mulligan is gone and here's what you do. You're on the front end, looking, projecting yourself into the future, and you have to ask yourself this question, "What is going to be important to me when I'm sitting in that rocking chair 30, 40, 50 years from now? What am I going to wish that I had spent my life doing because I don't get to do it over again". And you contemplate what's going to be important to you at that point, not what's important to you now, not making \$200,000 in some kind of job, not taking the best vacation you can, because that stuff's all going to be gone. Naked, you come into the world, naked you go out.

So you've got to think beyond this life and the comforts that you love. Beloved, I'm pleading with you. I would get down on my knees and beg but for the theatrics of that. when you are at death's door and about to give an account to a holy God about your life, my friend, I ask you to consider what is it that you want to show for what you did with the days that he gave to you? What do you want to show for yourself? I can tell you this, I can promise you this, two things. One is that if you don't soften your heart to these

things now, you won't get more soft as the years go by. People think, "Well, I'll live my life the way I want to and then I'll repent at the end." That ain't true. A life of sin and repeated sin just makes you harder and harder and harder against the things of God. You don't suddenly become soft when you've hardened your heart against him day by day. So don't fall into that deception. Beloved, but I'll tell you and promise you another thing. You don't want to be in that rocking chair having neglected Scripture, having neglected biblical priorities. You don't want to be in that rocking chair having shredded your family with your selfish sinful decisions. You don't want to have shredded your family with excessive devotion to business, ministry or a life of sin. You don't want that. That ain't a good place to be. Beloved, you don't want to reach the end and be sitting there in that rocking chair like my friend from the Far East, and I say this reverently what I'm about to say, you don't want to be sitting there in the rocking chair saying, "O my God, I've wasted it all. I've wasted it. I can't get it back. I can't even walk right anymore."

A day of reckoning is coming. A day of accountability before God, more importantly, is coming when we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account. Don't you see the urgency of the prayer? "God, teach me to number my days. Even if you don't teach anybody else in the room, God, teach me that so that I won't squander my life even if everybody else around me does." That's what Moses is praying. "God, life is so short. Teach me to number my days so that I might use it wisely."

Third and final point in this text: the urgency of life. There's just this developing climax that comes. The eternity of God, the brevity of life, teach us to number our days, now what do you do? Maybe you're like me and there are a lot more days in the rearview mirror than there are in the windshield ahead of you. Well, a couple of things that you need to see. This ends on a message of dependent hope. Understanding the brevity of life and meditating on that is designed to humble you. On the front end of my life when I was a young man, my late 20s, on the front end of my life, I felt the weight of verse 12, "teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." A dear woman, I have no idea who she was, gave Nancy and me a wedding present, a little inexpensive framed thing that had that verse inscribed on it and that verse just was always in front of my eyes. I tried to prioritize good decisions; we'll see what the Lord thinks of it when I stand before him in glory and give an account. But beloved, understand this, and I say this with a heart full of compassion knowing that there is a room full of broken hearts in front of me here. I get that. My heart's broken too. We're in the same boat. We're completely in the same boat together in these things. You can prioritize things, you can look at the rocking chair, you can say, "God, I'm going to gear my life toward the things that you would deem important," but beloved, even good decisions don't guarantee good outcomes, do they? You invest wisely, but the investments fail. You work hard at your job, but someone else takes it. You take care of your health, but you're stricken down with a debilitating disease. A loved one's health fails. You pour your life into your children and teach them the gospel, and you pray for them on your knees day after day after day, year after year after year, "God, save little Joey. Save little Susie. They're so dear and precious to my heart, Lord," and you pour yourself into that, and then 20 years go by and you find yourself looking, "Is that my kid?" They've rejected Christ. Maybe they've rejected you and don't want you to have a part in their lives. Oh, the sorrow that life brings and to

realize that even good decisions don't guarantee good outcomes. You don't get the outcome that you want, that's part of the theme of the book that Paul mentioned graciously earlier. You do good to people, and they turn against you. Toilsome duty takes precedence over your youthful dreams. Beloved, this is life. This is life. And the question that I ask in light of that is, "What then? What then? When life hasn't worked out according to your hopes and dreams, when it seems like your prayers have gone unanswered, when your health is failing, what then?" Here's the thing, beloved, that Moses teaches us in the final five verses: God designs, specifically designs that kind of weakness and pain to teach you dependent faith in him, to surrender all of the passing earthly priorities and find your satisfaction in Christ alone and to commit your way to him entirely regardless of what might come.

Look at verses 13 through 15.

13 Return, O LORD! How long?

See the urgency? Return, God, come back.

How long? Have pity on your servants! 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.

"God, I'm under the weight of affliction. Life has been difficult and I've seen so many evil things. O God," what's he praying here? "God, strengthen my heart. Help my heart. Give strength in my inner man in light of what I see. Give me joy that transcends the collapse of what I gave myself to." Moses wanted his labor to have lasting value. He wanted joy in the midst of it and so he turns to this kind of urgent praying. You know, he's not going through rote prayers. He's not just tossing through his prayer list. He's not just going through to say he had his quiet time. This is a man praying at the end of his life, a spiritual giant, praying at the end of his life, "God, help my heart. Strengthen my heart." And then in verses 16 and 17, we read this. He says,

16 Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. 17 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!

"God, time is short. Bless what we do now as we give ourselves over to your priorities. Bless it so that it would have some kind of lasting effect beyond my lifetime."

I said that in the early stage of my life, I felt the weight of verse 12, help us to number our days. These days I feel the weight of verse 17., "God, time is so short. Establish the work of my hands. God, there's so much to be done and life is so short. Guide my steps to do the right things. Supernaturally bless it so that it goes beyond my natural labors and strength. Time is so short and there's so much to do and there are so many relationships.

O God, help, strengthen us!" You could summarize the prayer this way and bring the whole Psalm into a single line, "Eternal God, show me grace so that your purpose might be fulfilled in the course of my very brief days."

Beloved, life is brief. Life is urgent. And we don't control the outcomes. And so the dependent, hopeful place that this Psalm leaves us is, "God, I look to you and you alone. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah. Help me. Use my life in lasting ways." Beloved, life is uncertain so look at the rocking chair, look at the mulligan, and then fall on your knees and plead urgently for grace.

Let's pray together.

Gracious God, I pray that you would take these dear friends and bless them in their lives. For those whose lives have never contemplated these themes, Father, may you take and shape them and use them and help them. For those at the end of life feeling the weight of regret, show grace and strengthen their hearts. May they find hope in the days that they still have left to serve you and use them well. For the young people, Father, help them to set a right trajectory from the start; so much better to set the trajectory early than to try to fix it when it's too late. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who loves us, gave himself up for us. We commit our ways to you and pray that you would guide us all our days. For the sake and glory of Christ we pray. Amen.

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