

A Biblical Perspective on the Brevity of Life

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I'm very excited to bring the text that I have for you here this morning. It's going to be out of Psalm 90 if you want to turn to Psalm 90 and start finding your way there. When Nancy and I were married 25 years ago, a humble woman give us a wedding gift that I still have but it was a simple frame that expressed Psalm 90:12 that said, "So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom." There was something about that verse that just kind of anchored itself in my soul and has been very formative in the way that I have approached life and ministry and I'm delighted to be able to share it with you here today. There is a particular reason for doing it here today. If you're a first-time guest, we've actually been studying through the book of Titus for a number of weeks now but we're taking a one-week break to look at Psalm 90 and there's a reason why we're doing that. There's a pastoral reason that I want to look at Psalm 90 for those of you that are visiting. For the past several weeks, there has been a lot of sorrow in our body, a lot of death, four or five families affected by significant deaths just in the very recent past and I know that if we spoke with some of you that are new here, that there are probably sorrows in your recent past as well. One of the things that I love about the Bible is that it addresses life as it really is. It doesn't pretend that life is always going to be happy. It doesn't pretend that life is always giddy and joyful. It enables us, it equips us to meet those times of sorrow with the truth of God's word that give us the strength and the comfort and the joy that we need in order to be able to walk through them with a sense of perspective and understanding that sustains us. I grieve over the superficial ministry that marks many of the churches in this day and age because I know that it's inevitable that their people are going to be faced with sudden calamity and that superficial, happy, giddy approach to ministry does nothing to prepare them for those times in life and they are lost when it comes and it hits them. Well, it's my desire here in today's passage to give you a foothold for those times of sorrow that are in your life; those times of uncertainty; those times where the reality of life and death roll over you like waves. I want you to be strengthened from God's word and it's a joy and a privilege for me to be able to do that. Thank you for being here this morning to share in this.

So we're going to look at Psalm 90. The title of this message is "A Biblical Perspective on the Brevity of Life." A Biblical perspective on the brevity of life. If you take notes, that's what you can write across the top of the page. I want to help you cultivate a biblical philosophy of life with this message so that you can live out the life that the Lord has

given you with a sense of clarity and understanding that guides you through the joyful times and also through the sorrowful times. We need to be equipped for both. Now, in Psalm 90, let me just give you a little bit of an overview, a quick one paragraph overview to kind of orient your thoughts on where we're going. The inscription of Psalm 90 tells us that it's a prayer of Moses. This Psalm was written by Moses almost certainly during the wilderness wanderings of Israel for those 40 years before the nation of Israel was able to enter into the Promised Land. That was a time of sorrow. It was a time of judgment. It was a time of much, much death as we'll see in just a little while. But in this Psalm, Moses is looking honestly at the situation and the sad circumstances that were around him and his nation and he reflects on, he meditates on, the eternal nature of God to open up with, and then he turns his attention from that vertical dimension of the eternality of God and he looks around at the brevity of life that's all around him, that was being pressed upon him by the circumstances of the nation at that time. Then having meditated on the eternality of God, the brevity of life for man, he then prays for God's blessing on the labor of his hands. We're going to walk through that and you're going to see all of that but that's just a sense: Moses is in a sad situation. He looks up to God. He looks around and then he prays. That's what we're going to see in Psalm 90. What he says, what he meditates on, what occupies his thinking, are the same things that liberate us to approach life with a biblical sense of reality that equips us for everything that we see. His prayer helps us put the brevity of life into perspective and that's what we need. We need to see it not only to give us comfort in the times of sorrow that so many of us are going through, but beloved, get this and this is going to come up later, I'm going to emphasize this, especially for you you young people, you young people that are in your teens, in your 20s, maybe early 30s and you're still kind of sorting out what life is going to be like for you, the direction that you're going to take. You must, absolutely must, embrace these things that we're going to see today if you're going to have any hope of shaping your life according to the priorities that you should live by. There is no question about it. So I really want us to be able to focus on this and I'm just praying that the Lord would give us grace to receive it with the clarity and power that he always attends for his word to have upon our hearts.

So there are four points that we're going to look at this morning. We're going to structure today's message around four points and to put life, the brevity of life in a biblical perspective. The first point that we see from this prayer of Moses is 1: you must embrace eternity. You must embrace eternity. You must have it clear in your mind that there is an aspect to life that totally transcends your 70 or 80 years here on earth. You cannot possibly begin to think rightly about life unless you start your thinking with the nature and character of an eternal God. If you only view life from an horizontal perspective about what you enjoy, what kind of entertainment you want to pursue and what you enjoy here on earth, listen, I will promise you something based on the authority of God's word: you're going to waste your life. You're going to squander the 70 years that God has given you if you simply live trying to go from one pleasure to the next. You cannot possibly live life correctly unless you start your thinking with the nature and character of an eternal God. That's what Moses does. That's the way that he prays here in Psalm 90.

Let's look at the first two verses to start with and believe it or not, we're going to make it through all 17 verses today which, for those of you that are visiting, for me to go through 17 verses would be quite an accomplishment. That's what we're going to do today. Psalm 90, verse 1, notice how Moses prays. He says, "Lord." Stop right there notice who he is speaking to. He is praying from the very start. He is invoking the name of the Lord as he prays and so he is praying here, this Psalm is a prayer in its entirety. It is a humble supplication from a man of God as the inscription tells us, "A prayer of Moses, the man of God." And what is he praying in the midst of these sorrowful circumstances? He says,

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

What Moses is doing here is he's starting his prayer with a completely God-centered perspective. He doesn't rush into the presence of God and say, "O God, I'm sorrowful. God, this is a hard time. God, our nation is perishing in this godforsaken desert." He comes and he sets all of his earthly circumstances aside and he focuses on the eternal nature of God as he begins this prayer and meditation. What he's saying here is this, look at what he says, verse 1, he says, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations." He's speaking as a representative of the nation of Israel in this prayer as he begins and what he is doing is he's connecting the nation of Israel that he is leading through the wilderness. He's connecting them with the people of faith who had gone before them. "You've been our dwelling place in all generations." He's immediately transcending time as he looks at the situation and he's no doubt thinking all the way back to the time when God made promises to Abraham that Abraham would be a father of a multitude back in Genesis 12 and Genesis 15. He says, "God, you've been our dwelling place in all generations." That was 600 years before Moses wrote these words and so he's taking a very long-term perspective as he prays before the living God. What he's saying here, what the gist of what he's saying here in this brief time is he's saying, "God, throughout all of those centuries that have intervened since you made promises to Abraham, you have been our dwelling place. You have been our refuge. You have been the one who has secured our future and guided us to this point. Lord, my life has been a brief 120 years," is how long Moses lived. But he looks back and he says, "Lord, for centuries you have been directing our people." Moses is writing 1,400 years before the time of Christ. He's looking back 600 years prior to that. We're talking about two millennia before Christ even came and here we are 2,000 years later reading the same words that Moses prayed. We're covering a span of 4,000 years in this one verse as we look at it here today. And throughout all those centuries, here's the point: God had been faithful to his people. Here's what you need to understand, beloved, as you read the history of the Old Testament and you go through Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, I realize those are switched, Deuteronomy. You go through all of Old Testament history and you realize that there were times when it was pretty meager for the people of Israel. They were subject to attacks; they were subject to wars and famines; times of prosperity would be followed by times of sin and despair. There were times where, as you're looking at that in the midst of the immediate circumstances, there isn't much evidence that God is doing anything. It seems like he's completely silent, that there is utter inactivity at the

time of your greatest need, so it seems. Well, the only way that you can find encouragement in the midst of those times is to step back from that and to remember the eternity of God.

Look at verse 2 with me in light of that. Moses says, "Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." So these really are an incredible two verses. Moses looks back, looking through the past history of Israel up to this moment, he looks back beyond that and he looks back to the point of creation and then he looks beyond that. He's looking back into eternity past and affirming the good eternal, holy character of God. He says, "You've always been who you are. And as we are going through the desert here, God, you are the same now as you were before the beginning of the earth." There is a transcendent nature to Moses' prayer here.

So, what we see here as Moses opens up this prayer is a perspective on eternity. Moses is mindful of the reality of the eternal character of God and here's what this means for you and me: it means that we have to be able to look at life, we have to be able to look at the character of God and we have to lift ourselves, as it were, out of our immediate circumstances and anchor our true perspective, the perspective that shapes the way we interpret life, we have to anchor it in the nature of this eternal God who existed before time began. That is the proper way to pray. That is the proper way to think. And it's the proper way to think about life. You must embrace eternity because, watch this, just looking at it from Moses' perspective, from all of the ups and downs and as they're in the middle of the wilderness in a time of judgment, what is he saying here except this: he's saying, "God, because you are eternal, because you are in control and you rule over all, that means something. It means that you are always accomplishing your eternal purposes as time unfolds before my eyes." There is never a moment in any circumstance where the eternal God is not perfectly accomplishing his purposes as he works out his plan that he established before the beginning of time. Here's what that means. Let's look at it this way, I want you to think about it this way: before the beginning of time, God established his eternal purpose. Through time, God is working out his eternal purposes and notice in verse 2, Moses says, "from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." He's looking at the completion of God's plan in eternity future and so before time began, God established his purpose. During time, he's working out that purpose and the finality, the conclusion, the grand climax of it all is going to be an everlasting future eternity. There will be no question in anyone's mind but that God achieved his purpose to perfection.

Beloved, you must interpret life in that sense. We only see a little little narrow sliver and that sliver sometimes pokes us and punctures our hand and hurts. I get that. But you've got to step back and realize the biblical reality that speaks of the eternal sovereignty of God, that he's always working out his purposes. Here's why that's important, God, the context of your life, the context of this moment in your life, this season in your life, the context of your 40, 50, 70, 80 years of life is this: God is working out his eternal purposes throughout all the universe, throughout all of history, throughout all the earth. He's a great God and so you are living out life today in the context, in the realm of God achieving his eternal purposes.

Now, call a little time out here and ask this question: what is the implication of that in day-to-day life for you and for me, through sorrow and through joy? What's the implication of that? What does that mean as I walk through sorrow? As I walk through joy? Turn to the right in your Bibles just a little bit to the book of Ecclesiastes 7. Beloved, you have to know how to interpret life and any interpretation of life that does not begin and end with the God of the Bible is the improper interpretation of life. There are stacks of philosophy books in libraries that are just wasted paper. Ecclesiastes 7:14 says this, "In the day of prosperity be happy." When joy and happiness come your way, enjoy it. Verse 14, "But in the day of adversity consider," think, remember that, "God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him." He says, "Look, it's easy to enjoy prosperity and it's good that you do but when adversity comes in your life, you have to step back and remember that God made that day of adversity in the same way that he made the day of prosperity that you enjoyed." You have to view all of life as coming from the hand of God and I say this gently, beloved, I say this with so much compassion in my heart, I want you to receive this as the gracious understanding from God's word that it is: when we walk through days of sorrow, God has appointed those for us. When you walk through a day of sorrow, you're not walking through a day that Satan somehow got the upper hand in. God is in charge of it all. His eternal hand, his eternal purpose is at work in everything that happens in your life. He has deemed it wise for you to go through adversity from time to time. Yes, it's hard and I speak gently to discouraged hearts this morning but when trials or long-term disappointment settle into your life, you must remember this: you must remember that an eternal sovereign God is working out his good and sovereign eternal purposes in your life and, watch this, his sovereign purposes, even through adversity, will prove to be good to you in the end if you're a Christian, if you've been redeemed by the blood of Christ. God is at work in it all and we have to embrace that or we're not thinking biblically at all.

Turn back to Job 2 just before the book of Psalms. You remember the immense calamities that Job went through: lost his fortune; lost his family except for his wife; then lost his health in verse 2 as Satan tried Job within the purposes and limits of God's permission upon his life. You remember the story, all of this within the restraints that God had put upon the unfolding of Job's life. Look at Job 2:9, "Then his wife said to him," in the midst of his sorrow, "'Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!'" "Put an end to this. Get yourself out of your misery." Then in verse 10, Job said to her, "'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips." He realized that those difficult circumstances were an outworking of the purposes of God and he understood something so fundamental that we receive what we consider good in life from God and he said we also receive adversity with equal acceptance and with equal resignation because the different spheres are all rooted in one single source and if we're going to praise God for the good times, we have to accept the adversity that comes as well. So you embrace eternity by which we mean you embrace the eternal purposes of God and you realize that you're never going to have a full perspective on everything that is happening at any given time maybe. Here's where that leads us when adversity comes as you're developing a biblical perspective on the brevity of life: it means that you

humble yourself under that adversity rather than resenting it, rather than arguing against it, rather than collapsing under the weight of it and saying, "It's just too much for me to bear." None of those are acceptable responses for a biblically thinking Christian. Not a one of them. Instead, you humble yourself under the adversity and you trust your heavenly Father.

1 Peter 5:10 says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." So we humble ourselves under the adversity for a time and trust the Lord to lift the weight when it pleases him and in his wisdom he deems it the proper time to do so. You see, the eternality of God, when you embrace eternity, it means that you stop trying to demand that your life conform to certain circumstances that you find appropriate and acceptable and instead you realize, "Oh, God is orchestrating my circumstances here. God has brought this into my life. Oh, this hurts but. God, I'm going to trust you and I accept it just like Job did before me, just like Christ accepted his adversity on my behalf on the cross, just like the saints since that time who have shed their blood for the sake of the testimony of Jesus. I'm going to humble myself under my little trial too, Lord, because that's the way biblical Christians live." More importantly, that's the way biblical Christians think. That's the way that we have to view life. You must embrace eternity.

Now, Moses goes on. He actually spends most of his time in the next section but it brings us to point 2. You must embrace eternity, point 1. Point 2: you must embrace brevity. You must embrace brevity. You must embrace, you must accept, you must calculate into your philosophy of life the fact that life is brief and death is the certain outcome of it. You have to think that way or you're not dealing with reality at all. Moses is still praying, go back to Psalm 90:3, Moses is still praying as we go to verse 3 here but now he's praying from a different perspective. Look at verses 3-6 this morning,

3 You turn man back into dust And say, "Return, O children of men." 4
For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by,
Or as a watch in the night. 5 You have swept them away like a flood, they
fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. 6 In the
morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and
withers away.

What is he saying here? He's looking at the brevity of life. Note the contrast here, he's saying, "God, you are eternal but we by contrast are temporal. We are temporary. We are transient. We're just passing through." And he's praying and thinking about it from God's perspective and he says, "God, for you 1,000 years is like a four hour watch in the night. God, I understand you see time completely differently than I do. You see it completely differently. Your perspective is utterly different. You are eternal. You dwell above time but we're transient. We die and we return to dust." Let me help you understand where he's going with this. Look at verse 6 there. He's talking about the nature of life, the nature of life of man on earth because in verse 3 he had been talking about man and children of men. In verse 6, talking about their lives, he says, "it flourishes and sprouts a new; Toward evening it fades and withers away." Just like you and I see a beautiful flower

grow up in the middle of summer and you enjoy the beauty of that but give it a day or maybe two and it starts to wither and it's passing away and then it's gone and then it's just crumpled old leaves. What you see in a flower is the way God sees your life. Momentary. Temporary. Not lasting. This is the nature of life. We die and return to dust. Here's the thing, oh, is this ever so important, is this ever so crucial for you to understand especially if you've never thought this way before: it is the nature of day-to-day life to lull you into a false sense of security. You are used to the fact that today is like yesterday was and yesterday was like last week and last week was like last month. You say, "Okay, therefore tomorrow will be like today only more so," and you just kind of start to plan things out without a clear understanding, a clear perspective informing your sense that it's not always going to be this way. It's not always going to be that you wake up and are healthy in the morning and you go to bed at night.

You see, one of the things of our past few weeks as a Fellowship is that that has been pressed upon us time and time and time again with the next phone call, the next email, the latest email, saying, "So-and-so has passed away." You see, when these kinds of circumstances come into the life of a body, when there is just a heavy repetition of death like what we've been going through together, we are to look at that and learn. We are to look at that and reflect and to understand and to realize, "Oh yeah, all of life is like this." We just don't always see it with such clarity. Look, I know because of what comes later in this Psalm, you and I are the same way about this. There is a deep seated assumption in our hearts that life is going to continue on like it always has. You don't even think about it, you just make an assumption and you can read your assumptions by the way that you talk. "Well, next year we're going to be here or there. We've got a retirement fund for 2025." All of that is built on an assumption that life is going to continue on like it always has. You have a false sense of security about tomorrow. We think life is going to be the same but do you know what? The reality of it is that it's like this: our family has been to Niagara Falls a time or two in different times and Niagara Falls always kinds of gives me the creeps to be honest with you. It's a beautiful place. I've stood on the edge knowing that Niagara Falls is off to my left. I've stood about a mile upstream from the actual Falls and you look at the river and the river looks relatively placid on the surface but you know, because of what you know is down there, you know that if you step into that river that there is an unseen current that is going to sweep you over the Falls if you are ever so unfortunate to be in the midst of that current. You can't get away from it and you just kind of instinctively know that and that's why it gives me the creeps. You know, I'm standing feet away from certain destruction. That's usually when I say, "Oh, let's go now," because I don't like it. What I want you to see is that your life is like Niagara River and you are in the river. You look around and it looks like everything is okay, that things are going to continue on but there is an unseen current in your life that is pulling you toward the certainty of death. We don't like to think that way. Our lives are really just like a river heading for the waterfall cascading over the cliffs of time.

You can see silent testimony to what Scripture is saying here whenever you walk in a cemetery. You walk in a cemetery, especially some of the older ones, and you see a name etched in stone: Sylvia Smith 1840-1925, 85 years she lived. You look at that and it doesn't take much imagination to say when Sylvia was in her 40s and 50s, it no doubt

seemed like her life was going to go on forever because it was just day after day, 365 days and one year and then another and then another and everything is still pretty much the same and you just get lost in the thought that it seems like maybe you don't even think about it. You just kind of assume it's going to keep going but here we are in 2013 and we look at Sylvia's faded name on the gravestone and we say, "Wow, 85 years but now here it is 80 years later and Sylvia is forgotten." You understand right? That that's going to be your name on the stone one day? You understand that one day it's going to be your name and somebody may stumble along in 2100 and say, "Huh, So-and-so Smith, 1961-2035 and now he's gone. I wonder what's for lunch." That's how much thought is going to be given to your name in the future. That's the outcome. However long you live, whether you live 44 years or whether you live 94 years, the outcome is the same. You are headed toward an appointment with death. The Bible says, "It is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment." This is appointed. We can't escape it. And maybe you're only 10 or 12, maybe you're 25, maybe that seems so distant that it's a waste of time to even think about it but the reality is that it's going to be you and me.

Now listen, Moses here as he thinks about these things, is not being morbid and I'm not being morbid by bringing these things to your attention here this morning. This might seem like an indirect route to being comforted in the midst of your sorrow but right-thinking is what produces good comfort in our lives. We have to look at this and say, "This is the nature of life." And when you and I understand that our lives are brief and passing, beloved, it humbles our pride and influences our priorities in how we use these short few years in life. Moses takes it a step further. Why is it that our lives are short? Verse 7, it is because God has judged the human race for sin. Look at verse 7, he says,

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger And by Your wrath we have been dismayed. 8 You have placed our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your presence. 9 For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. 10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.

Look at verse 11.

11 Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

You see, Moses is giving us a theological interpretation of the brevity of life. In the words of the of Apostle Paul, he says, "Death entered into the world because of sin." God was angry with the sin and rebellion of man and he judged it and death is the consequence of that. That's why our lives are brief. He's not talking simply about our individual sins being judged with the brevity of our own life, this is a judgment on all humanity. Death reminds us of the rebellion of humanity against its Creator.

Now, let me give you a little bit of math here. Moses saw this ongoing death in those years in the wilderness. I won't take you through all of the calculations but an entire

generation of the nation of Israel died in the wilderness. When you do the math on that, there were about 50, maybe 75 people each day that died as they were wandering around in the wilderness before they got to enter into the Promised Land. There was grave after grave after grave after grave, day after day after day after day. Moses, put yourself in the shoes of Moses, the sandals of Moses if you prefer, Moses must have groaned under the weight of that constant death, under the constant reminder of judgment, the constant sorrow that he saw in the lives of the people around him. Every grave reminded them of their disobedience when they wanted to return to Egypt rather than take the Promised Land.

Life brings sorrow. We can't avoid it. We get started and then death takes us away. This unseen dynamic governs all of life and yet we are vulnerable because of the sameness of day-to-day life makes us miss it. We forget. We don't take it into account and when death does come, it strikes us for a time and then it starts to fade away again. So, the one thing that should really calculate into the way that we approach life, we're prone to avoid it because it's uncomfortable, we're prone to miss it because it only comes spasmodically, periodically, unpredictably. We can't grasp that in our natural ability. We're not wired to think this way. We're wired to think about today and maybe tomorrow. Beloved, I'm saying this with such urgency in my heart for your well-being: the thing that you most need to think rightly about life is the thing that you are most likely to miss and to ignore and avoid. So what do you do? You can't, beloved, you can't deny the truth of what Scripture says about this and we know it from experience and yet we're so weak spiritually that we can't get the most important point so what do we do?

Psalm 90:12, look at it and I want you to embrace this verse and see the urgency of it for you personally, individually. Look back at verse 11 and let me remind you what he says there because it leads into verse 12. He says, "Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?" Moses says, "God, we all miss this. Who understands this? Who understands your wrath upon sin? Who understands and lives out with wisdom according to the brevity of life? Who gets this, God? No one does." And so he humbly prays in verse 12, this is a little framed thing that that forgotten woman from 25 years ago gave us on our wedding day, bless her name. Verse 12,

12 So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

What he is saying is this: he's saying, "God, I understand that I would not get this if I was left to my own devices. Therefore, I am asking for a supernatural work from your hand to work on my mind, to help me grasp that which I would otherwise miss, to live by that which I would otherwise ignore. God, teach me. Teach us. Help us because we're going to miss it. We're in the river heading for the waterfall and we think we're on vacation swimming in a pool when this is actually taking us toward the cliff. God, help me. God, I only get one shot at life. Help me get it right."

Now, I'm going to give you an extended illustration here. Something that actually has shaped my life for the past 30 years or so, fitting along with the lines of Moses' prayer

here, teach us to number our days. You young people especially, I want you to listen and pay attention to this because it's so important. It's the nature of life. Periodically we face crossroads decisions: on marriage, should I marry this person? Should I take this job? Should I relocate to another place? And we tend to think about it just in terms of a little circle of decisions and immediate desires and kind of miss the long-term implications of it. When you're facing those kinds of decisions, remember Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days," and here's a way to help you do that and actually even if you're not facing a decision, you're just in the middle of life, this is a great thing for all of us to take to heart. I want you to picture yourself in a rocking chair on a front porch some place quiet and serene. You're at the end of your life. You're in your late 70s, early 80s maybe and you realize as you're sitting on that rocking chair that you're at the end and there's not much time left for you and you're thinking and you're looking back on your life. You're an old man, you're an old woman now and you understand that you don't get to do life over again. You don't get to repeat it and go back and undo some of the foolish decisions that you made. You ask yourself this question, you're picturing yourself in the future but you're interacting with yourself now. You ask yourself this question: what's going to be important to me at that point in my life? When I'm on that rocking chair, what is going to matter to me then? When you are at death's door and about to give God an account for your life, what do you want to be able to show him? What do you want to show for yourself?

You see, there is both a positive and a negative aspect to this rocking chair thing. Negatively speaking, you don't want to be in that rocking chair having neglected biblical priorities, having shredded your family with indifference, having squandered your life in the pursuit of silly entertainment and sin because when you're in that rocking chair, the utter emptiness of that is going to be so evident and so crushing that you look on it and you're going to say, "I have wasted the one life that I had to live." Don't come to that rocking chair and have to look back on your life and say and I say it reverently, "Oh my God, I've wasted it all and I can't do anything about it. I have just squandered 75 years on nothingness and now I can't go back and undo it." No, don't do that. Don't do that. Look forward to that rocking chair and let it have a positive impact on your life especially you young people, especially those of you that are in your teens and you have it all in front of you and you can make decisions now that affect direction for decades. You're going to come to it and still have a sense of incompleteness for sure but you can look back on it and say, "God, by your grace, I pursued something that mattered. By your grace, Lord, I used my days with wisdom. I didn't pursue the vain empty philosophies and entertainment of the world. I loved Christ. I tried to make him known. I tried to serve him and love his people and be faithful to Scripture." That's what's going to matter and do you know what? Nothing else is going to matter. Nothing else is going to matter but that.

You see, when I look out and it's surprising to me, it's almost a little bit unsettling to realize that most of you are younger than I am. Ah, when did that happen? Beloved, do you understand that you've still got time to prepare for that rocking chair? Do you understand that even if you squandered time up until now, you still have opportunity? Do you understand that the most urgent prayer of your heart in response to what the Bible says here is, "Oh God, teach me to number my day so that I can present to you a heart of

wisdom, so that when I come to the end of my life, when I step before the judgment seat of Christ, I can say, 'Here it is, Lord, in all of its imperfection. I lived for you.'" The only way that you're going to have that point of satisfaction in the rocking chair is if you take all of this into calculation and let it shape the way that you live now. You're not going to accidentally fall into that. You say, "Why do you seem to be upset?" I'm not upset. It's just urgent. It's too important to talk about this like we were talking about yesterday's ballgame. We're talking about your life. We're talking about what you present to the Lord at the end of it. We're talking about eternal matters out of the word of God. For you young moms, let me just say this: being faithful to your kids and to your husband is a great way to prepare for that rocking chair. God bless you. The day-to-day routine. We're not talking about doing something that the world recognizes as great, we're talking about living according to biblical priorities. For a young mom, that's loving your family and loving your husband. We'll see that in Titus 2 soon enough.

You just have to think about life, beloved, and so you see Christ and you say, "Lord, teach me to number my days so that I would live wisely." Now, I understand that to think about the brevity of life for some people they think that's depressing. I don't see it that way and Moses didn't either. Listen, Moses did not despair as he wrote Psalm 90. He's not writing from despair. Here's what it did, oh, you've got to follow this. You embrace eternity. You see life from an eternal perspective. You embrace brevity and it motivates you and makes your approach to life urgent to be serious about it and not squander it. You realize your weakness and you realize the difficulties and Moses wasn't done. He brings us to our third point. What does all of this do? It brings us to our third point and I'm going to put it this way: you must embrace humility. You must embrace humility. You see, understanding embracing the eternity of God and understanding and embracing the brevity of life has a profoundly humbling impact on your soul which is really healthy. It's really, really healthy because you start to realize, "Do you know what? I'm not in control here. God is. I'm not going to be here forever. Life is brief." It keeps you from thinking that you're the center of the universe and start to be motivated to seek God in a more urgent, serious way than simply, "God, thank you for this food and help us get us through our day." We just have to think completely differently.

So you embrace humility because understanding the brevity of life humbles us. It makes you realize or it should, it should make you realize that you need divine help. You are not equipped to live a serious life on your own. You're not in a position to live out these matters of great eternal significance on your own wisdom. And even if you see it and you're humbled before it, you're not strong enough to live with the weight of it on your own. We are weak, we are temporal and we are by nature foolish. So what do you do? You embrace humility. What humility does in this sense that we're talking about, is that humility drives you to a dependent prayer to God. Look at what Moses does. First of all, he prays for mercy and for joy. Look at verses 13-15. Remember, he's just gone through the brevity of life talking about the fury and the anger of God. "God, give us grace that we could number our days and have a heart of wisdom." Now in verse 13, his perspective shifts and he says,

13 Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants. 14 O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. 15 Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, And the years we have seen evil.

"Lord, we have seen the brevity and the sorrow of life and it's more than we can bear on our own and so, God, I humbly ask you for mercy that you would help us to know joy and satisfaction even in the midst of these otherwise depressing circumstances." He says, "God, we would be depressed by all of this and so I ask you to give us spiritual strength that the joy of the Lord would be our strength so that we would find satisfaction in you because there's not anything in this life that will give us abiding satisfaction. God, help my heart here. Show us mercy so that we can transcend the despair of this brief, sorrowful life. God, be merciful to us. Help us to know real joy in the midst of it." There is an implicit recognition there that God is pleased to give his children joy in the midst of this brief life. Ask him for it. Just ask him. You humble yourself and say, "God, show kindness to me that I don't deserve. I appeal to your mercy. Be kind to me in the midst of this a brief life."

So he prays for mercy. Secondly, and this is where we will close. Actually, it's not where we'll close, it's where we close Psalm 90. Notice what he prays at the end. He prays for a lasting impact of his life. This is where you tie together the brevity of life and your walk with God. In verses 16 and 17, this is where it all connects. This is where your prayers should be centered as you contemplate the brevity of life. Look at what he says in verse 16,

16 Let Your work appear to Your servants And Your majesty to their children. 17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands.

Do you know what he's praying there? He's saying, "Lord, give us grace so that we could see some of the work of the outworking of your eternal purposes." He says, verse 16, "Let your work appear to your servants." "We are so caught up in the sorrow and the brevity of life, Lord, pull back the shades so that we can see what you're really doing here. Give us some insight here so that it would bless us and encourage us and motivate us. Help us that way, Lord." Then do you know what he's saying in verse 17? It's an urgent, almost desperate prayer and he repeats it twice for emphasis when he says, "Confirm for us the work of our hands." He's saying, "God, I'm doing something here. Please Lord, I ask you, work through the work of my hands in such a way that there will be an enduring result to it that transcends my life. God, be gracious and establish what I do so that my life won't be wasted. I can't just plan it out and have it go according to plan, Lord. I need you to do something. I need you to be working behind the scenes to establish what I do and what I say so that it has an eternal lasting value because if you don't do that, it's all going to be squandered and, God, why would you give me 80 years of life just to see it squandered on something that doesn't last? So God, confirm it. Establish it. Do that which I cannot do on my own. Let it have a lasting impact." One writer summed up that prayer this way. He says, "So long as we are here, God requires us to do something

so let us therefore find out what that is and do it and while we do it, let us pray that God may establish it so that it may remain to bless posterity." "God, let my life be such that the impact of it lingers on in a way to bless people after I'm gone." You parents that are raising your kids in a godly home, that's exactly what you're doing. God bless you in the midst of all of the seeming day-to-day sameness of that but as you're doing that and as you're being faithful, urgently pray, "God, let my efforts, my imperfect efforts to be faithful to my family here, let that work, God. Do something. Establish it so that the impact of that lingers on long after I'm gone."

This gives you some perspective for those of you that have been here over the past several months. This gives you perspective and insight into something that I have said repeatedly from the pulpit about our church. I have repeatedly said that we are not building this just for ourselves. We want to plant trees that other people come along later and live under the shade of it. What we're saying when we say that is a philosophy of ministry, what we're saying is, "God, let the simple imperfect things that we're doing as a Fellowship here, God, please, please God, please God, establish roots and establish a foundation so that this outlives all of us as a place where the word of God will be taught long after we're gone." You see, it's not about you and me. We are part of it but we're kind of incidental in one sense because we want this to outlive us. We want to have a church of biblical priority and biblical preaching that's going to be here 70 years from now, long after you and I are all gone and no one remembers who was here in 2013. You see, we're mindful of the fact that our lives are brief. I'm mindful of the fact that this is starting toward the end of my life, not the beginning of it. So, we can't do everything that is necessary. We can't guarantee with our own hands and with our own strength and with our own plans what this is going to be like 50 years from now and so what does that do? It humbles us and it makes us pray, "O God, do something in the midst of our feeble efforts. Bring your eternal omnipotent power to bear on this so that it survives the test of time." That's what we want. That's why we do what we do. We pray for God to give it impact. "God, here we are. We have work to do. Please help us to get it right." We say that corporately. We say that individually in the way that we live life.

Now, the final point. We're going to go beyond Psalm 90 to close. I want you to turn over to the book of Philippians now because they're still been, with everything that we've said, there has been a bit of an earthbound perspective to it in one sense. We're thinking that we've been working out at least over the brevity and humility of things; we're thinking about how this impacts things now and today and what we do. But look over at Philippians 1. Remember the title of this message is "A Biblical Perspective on the Brevity of Life." Now it's my privilege to speak to those of you who are Christians and to remind you of the good stuff, the really good stuff. Let me just say it this way: if you're a Christian as so many of you are, brothers and sisters in Christ with the speaker here this morning, if you're a Christian, what I'm about to say is actually a joyful thing: you cannot cling to this life. You're not supposed to cling to this life as if this was the sum total of the reason that you exist. This life isn't like that. It was never intended to be that way. You see, if you're a Christian, the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed you for the purpose of you spending eternity with him in heaven. That was the purpose of your redemption and so your heart, you should find as you go along in life that ever increasing in your heart is

that desire to be with Christ exceeding your desire to remain here on earth. Look at Philippians 1:21, Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." By the way, the fourth point: you must embrace priority. You must embrace priority by which we mean that your priority is your eternal redemption in Christ when you're with him in heaven. That's the priority. Not what happens in this life. Now with that said, cleaning up after myself there, Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." What Paul is saying there and I know you're familiar with that passage, what Paul is saying is this, "I'll stay here as long as Christ wants me to stay and I'll be joyful to do it." As he's writing to the Philippians, he says, "I'll serve you and help you as long as Christ gives me breath." But he says, "In my heart, I want to go and be with Christ. I love him more than anything on this earth. To be with Christ, to see my Savior face-to-face, to be in the presence of his perfected glory, to be separated from sin and temptation forever, to be there, that's going to be great. That's where I really want to be. That's what really stirs my heart at its deepest level. In the final analysis, I want to be with Christ. My priority," Paul is saying, you should be saying as a Christian, training your heart to think this way, "my priority is to enter into God's eternal purpose for my life and that eternal purpose is for me to be with Christ, for me to be with the one who bought me with his own blood. That's what I want." And so, when the specter of death comes to us personally, sure there is sorrow in contemplating earthly goodbyes but death is simply the entrance into the appointment that God had for you before the beginning of time, for you to be with Christ forever. That's a biblical perspective on the brevity of life. Thank God I'm not going to be here for 120 years. Thank God that this life on earth doesn't go on forever because what I really want, what I really, really want when it's all stripped away, the one defining desire and ambition of my life is to be with Christ because that's very much better and that's a legitimate, perfect, holy desire for a Christian to have because that's why Christ laid hold of you in the first place was that you would be his forever in his presence. So we enjoy this life while we have it: we serve, we're joyful, we're glad, we're happy to be here. When Christ whistles us to come home, we don't hesitate. We run to the sound. We run to the joy. We run to the fulfillment and say, "Finally, after all these years it's reached its culmination and perfection." That's going to be great.

Having your priority about that clear in your mind frees you. It gives you liberty to leave when the time comes and you say, "Of course, this is where it was headed all along." That's why Christians can die with smiles on their faces. That's why Christians triumph over death. That's why Christians are bold and courageous in the midst of adversity, in the midst of martyrdom, in the midst of cancer sapping their final breath from them. Finally, leaving it behind. Christ is using this passageway of death to call me into glory. Beloved, life is serious. Death is serious. Biblical thinking gives us the understanding, the confidence, the joy and the serenity to triumph through it all.

Let's pray together.

For some of you, there is a more fundamental issue. I've been speaking to Christians in this message. Those of you that aren't Christians, oh, what a mess and disaster your life is. You must repent and turn to Christ in humble faith for the forgiveness of your sins. Christ is calling you today. Christ has pressed upon your mind today the reality of death to cause you to fear God and to turn to him, to confess your sins freely to Christ and to seek him for forgiveness and for eternal life. Don't waste this opportunity when that's been impressed upon your heart today. Right where you're sitting right now say, "Christ, I surrender all to you. Save me and thank you for redeeming me before I plunged over the waterfall to a certain death."

For the rest of us,

Our Father, I pray that you would grant us grace to see our mortality so that we would live by the priorities of your word. Especially help the young people here, Father, who are on the verge, who are on a path and with their affections and the things that they love and pursue right now, are on a path, setting a path to squander it all. God, help them. Redirect them. Change their perspective. Change their passions and their priorities and their affections so that they would seek after Christ in his word and make that the living, abiding reality of their life until you call them home. God, it's just too urgent for us not to ask you humbly and profoundly to do that all the way down to the little ones two and three years old, Father, who can't even understand right now. You lay your hand upon them and rescue them from the futility of this earthly life.

Father, as we live out our days, we ask you to grant us joy and satisfaction. Father, we've talked about weighty issues here and there are hearts that are heavy with immediate earthly sorrow. I ask you to grant them, to show them your loving kindness, your faithful love, your goodness and the reality of the certainty of the accomplishment of your eternal purposes. Give strength and grace to their hearts today.

Father, for all of us, we humbly ask that we might by your grace hear those cherished words at the end when death ushers us into your presence, may we see the open arms of a willing and gracious Savior saying, "Well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." Father, if we could only hear those words, nothing else would matter. If we could come to the end and hear an expression of approval and satisfaction from the lips of our Savior, it would all be worth it. Help each one here, Father, to know the joy of those great words from our wonderful Savior. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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