

Numbering the Year Ahead (Psalm 90)

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Date: 11 December 2022

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- [0 : 00] So Psalms chapter 90 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our inequities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath. We finish our years with a moan.
- Our days may come to 70 years or 80 if our strength endures. Yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass and we fly away.
- If only we knew the power of your anger. Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- Relent, Lord, how long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
- [1 : 30] Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.
- May the favor of the Lord, our God, rest on us. Establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. And that is the word of God.
- Amen, amen. Amen. Wow, afternoon everybody. It's lovely to be here with you to preach God's word.
- I might just move this up. My name's Sam. I'm a pastor up the road at Howick Baptist Church. I have a wife and two kids at home. It's a big day for them coming to two services, so they stayed home.
- But yeah, it's good to be here, to be able to share the Word of God with you. It's lovely to sing with you, sing some carols that we sang this morning at our church. And I just hope that we're encouraged as we come to Psalm 90.
- [2 : 30] Let's just pray together. Heavenly Father, I pray that your Word would be very quick this morning, that we'd be quick to hear it. To understand it and comprehend it.
- That we'd be quick to take it into our hearts and believe it and treasure it and desire it and know it to be true. And then quick to see it at work in our lives as we go about our day, Lord God.
- So please come quickly with your Word this afternoon, I pray. Amen. Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. That verse really stood out to me, particularly in light of a coming new year, or every coming new year.
- Already we're starting to see New Year's posts and things. So Spotify, just a couple of weeks ago, put out your top most listened to things of 2020. For me, the thing I always click on is the top 10 books from 2020.
- [3 : 38] So the Christian authors. And then I'll read all of them. And if all of them say, like, these three books. If it's in top 10 for certain people of all these three books, I'll just go and buy them. Make a big purchase at the end of December.

As people reflect on the year, we look back and think, what was good? What did I do? Perhaps you've just finished uni. Perhaps you've just finished school and you're about to go to uni.

Perhaps it's just good to have another year of school done, another year of uni done. But we look back upon our year and we number our days. We take those 365 days and we kind of assess them.

Were they a success or failure? Did we struggle with their joys? Did we enjoy them? And this is a wise thing to do, to reflect upon your life, see how you've been at work, see how God's been at work.

And then once we've done that, we look ahead, of course, to the next 365 days. What do you want to achieve? What are your plans? Do you have resolutions about your health and fitness and finance and devotional life?

[4 : 38] Do you have a new job to start? A new uni degree? A new year at school? There's things coming up that you want to be prepared for. There's things coming up that you want to do well.

And so I looked at verse 12, teach us to number our days. And I thought, this is what we're all starting to do. So how do we do it wisely? How do we do it correctly?

Number our days and particularly the next 365 of them. And what I discovered as I read the rest of Psalms, so I just found that verse to begin with. And then I was like, I should probably look at what the rest of the Psalm says about this one key verse about what we're doing.

And it really surprised me. What the Psalm has to offer, what God has to offer for a good year, is not kind of more resolutions or like top 10 things to do or prepare for in the year ahead.

But what it has is a real grasping of reality. A real grasping and being realistic about the reality we live in. So we're going to have kind of a glorious wisdom on one hand that we get to live with every day.

[5 : 41] And then also a sad wisdom that we have to wrestle with every single day in the year ahead. And I think if we can take in these two realities and live with them step by step, day by day, it will help us to make decisions well, to walk well, to have good study habits, to have good relationships with people and with God.

If we take in this wisdom that God offers us here, if we grasp the truth of our existence before God, I think we'll live wisely. Before we get into the Psalm and these two realities that we live with, first I just want you to note that the context of the Psalm, it says it was written by Moses.

He was a leader of God's people. And most people think that this was given to him, this Psalm was written while he was leading Israel, wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years.

Remember, they wouldn't go into the promised land, so God said, you're going to wander for 40 years. So it was kind of a time of national discouragement, a time of pointless wandering.

And I highlight this because over the last kind of three years, I think as a nation, as a world, we've kind of gone through a time of discouragement and sometimes pointlessness, being stuck at home and frustration and difficulty.

[6 : 58] And so it's a somewhat similar situation that we've found ourselves in, that the people who first read the Psalm is. So I'm hoping he's offering us a good wisdom, even when things in the world don't seem to go right.

So the first reality we need to live with, we need to live in light of eternity. We are living with eternity in mind. This is the wonderful and glorious wisdom we get to live with.

So look at verse 1 and 2 with me. Our Lord, you have been our dwelling place through all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Those are some wonderful verses to begin with. Even in the desert where Israel was wandering around, even in the desert, they dwelt with God. They had this secondary place, a secondary home, a secondary reality that they got to enter into, which is God's presence.

And it's an old place. They got to go through all generations. And before the mountains were brought forth, it was an eternal place from everlasting to everlasting. We dwell with this reality of eternal life come to us when we dwell and sit with God.

[8 : 14] So when we plan our calendar year, we have to zoom out a lot. So you might imagine the calendar ahead that you separate into 12 months, depending how big a planner you are.

You know, you block out this year. You look at busy things you've got coming up. And then you could maybe even zoom out another year and add another year on. And then you could add decade and decade and century and century and just years going back, years and years going forward.

But that timeline, it goes on forever. For eternity, it goes on a timeline with God. God is eternal.

We are eternal. It goes on forever. We live in light of this. Now, this has implications about how we will live this year ahead, which we'll come to in later verses.

But for now, know that we're not just living for this year, nor for next year. We are living for eternity. We are living with eternity in mind. And if this year affects our time internal, then we don't want to waste it.

[9 : 20] Then we want to make the most of it if one little thing we do now affects eternity. So we aren't just living for ourselves. We're living with God.

We're living for eternity. So we plan and live with a year ahead with eternity in mind. Next, and a bit longer, we see the sad reality of frailty or transience.

So there's no simple way to say the opposite of eternity. Transience is the one that I came up with. But the point is we're temporary and we're frail.

Perhaps this passage would say we're dusty. Look at verse 3. You turn people, this is God's, you turn people back to dust, saying God, saying return to dust, you mortals.

So we're a dusty people. We began as dust when God formed us out of the ground and we return to dust when we die. The dust spoken about here, I imagine, was the dust or dirt of the earth, which in the desert as they're wandering, which isn't familiar to us.

[10 : 28] But you can just imagine the Israelites walking in the desert and seeing dust being blown about. And when it speaks about them being dusty, they could really get a sense of their frailty.

For us, we think of like dustiness on the shelves or around home. So you might imagine that you get your vacuum cleaner and you empty it out and there's all that gross grey dust and then you pile it up high and then you try kind of form it into a dusty human being.

Of course, it would fall apart. But you just imagine that dusty human being trying to take shape. And God's saying that's what we're like. We just return to dust, poof, down to dust.

That's our existence before God. We're transient. We're temporary. We are frail. And this frailty is contrasted with God's eternity.

These two realities kind of live side by side. We live with eternity. We live with our own dustiness. Look at verses 4 to 6. For a thousand years in your sight, God, are but as yesterday when it was passed or as a watch in the night.

- [11 : 37] You sweep them away with a flood. They're like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers.
- We're very fragile. We're small in reality. Our days are quick in light of eternity. So for God, a thousand years is like a dream that you can hardly remember. It just flies by and you can't quite grasp it in the morning.
- One thousand years to God, you know, and in light of eternity is just the cycle of grass or a plant. And Anna, my wife, she really enjoys gardening, but we moved our house a couple of years ago.
- And she rather ambitiously brought new plants for our place, even though we had girls to look after and boxes to unpack and pictures to hang up. And so they were forgotten about for two days in summer and they were just left out there.
- And in two days they were just gone. We hadn't been watered. They hadn't been looked after. The heat just killed them off. That flew by. We forgot about it and they died. For God, a thousand years flies by like that, like flowers withering in the sun.
- [12 : 45] If we are dust, God's kevala. If we are grass, then God is an oak tree. If we are one second, God is a trillion years.
- This is a jarring reality with God. To be with God, this eternal God, and yet to be here on earth, knowing one day we will die.
- So as we look ahead to next year, we need to reckon with our shortness of time and our frailty. We can't get everything done.
- We'll fall apart as the dusty beings we are if we don't live before God, if we don't recognize our own weakness, if we don't live with this reality.
- More on this in the verses to come. But our kind of transience is further explained by the reality that we live under wrath. This is another sad reality, another sad thing we have to grasp.
- [13 : 44] We are not only dusty, but we are burdened by wrath. So look at verse 7 and 8. For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath we are dismayed.
- You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins, in the light of your presence. Our existence, your existence, my existence is a moral one.
- Whatever resolutions or actions you take, they're not amoral or unimportant. They move you towards a good or evil, right or wrong, health or sickness.
- And according to this verse, either towards wrath or righteousness. Life with God or wrath under God. When we dwell with God, our secret sins are shown up and we live with that sin always before us.
- We live with that sin before us. And ever since Adam and Eve ate from that first forbidden tree and disobeyed God, God has brought a punishment or brought death to us all.
- [14 : 48] Before there was sin, there was no need for wrath. There was no aging and death. But because of sin, wrath and death came. For Israel, they had sinned against God by not going into the promised land as commanded.
- And then God had punished them with never being able to enter that promised land. And so they were wandering in this desert, that generation, under this wrath. But the application of living under God's wrath are not just for them, for that specific situation.
- Because we all sin. And our sin, and sin in this world, affects us all generally. So look at verses 9 and 11.
- For all our days pass away under your wrath. Sorry, verse 9. We bring our years to an end, like a sigh. The years of our life are 70, or even by reason of strength, 80.

Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone, and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

[15 : 55] All our days pass away under God's wrath. It's a constant burden to us. Everything is affected by sin and God's judgment.

Our aging and tiring, malfunctioning bodies. You're all pretty young. Maybe your bodies aren't there yet. But maybe your parents are starting to get a bit old.

Starting to need to go to the doctors and the hospital a lot more. They're feeling the effects. You're seeing the effects of sin and God's wrath on the world.

Perhaps it's just the kind of back-breaking hourly grind of studying that we feel kind of passing away under the burden and difficulty of work.

And eventually, this feels like a long way off for you guys, but eventually our lives do come often to a very apathetic end. I go and visit elderly folk from our church, and sometimes at the end of life, it's really hard.

[16 : 59] They can hardly concentrate or talk or move themselves. Sometimes they'll come in, and they'll be getting shaved. If you guys know me later in life, and I'm in a retirement village, don't let them shave my beard no matter what they do, all right?

But they'll be getting shaved or showered or things like that because their life is coming to an end, and their bodies are tired and worn out. This is the reality of life.

Maybe not next year for you, but years ahead, this is a reality. We will taste the effects of wrath upon us, all of us. And so that question comes at the end there.

Have you stopped to consider the power of God's anger? Who has considered the power of God's anger for sin? This is a sad wisdom we must learn about the year to come that is lived under wrath.

Can you number your days well now? Can you feel their shortness, the reality of them, not just your resolutions and dreams for the year ahead, but actual life in this world, your days are numbered and burdened with wrath?

[18 : 16] And so we come to verse 12. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Number them short, your days.

Number them long. Number them eternal. Number them fragile. And like much of the wisdom in the Bible, it isn't black and white.

That would be command, so do this, don't do that. It's obvious. But wisdom places us in often a messy and jarring reality of the world, in this case, our eternal and temporal realities.

And we're kind of left there to navigate while fearing and trusting the Lord. Unfortunately, we have Moses' response to these two realities and this glorious and sad wisdom.

And it comes in verses 13 to 17. It says, Return, O Lord. This is what he asked. Return, O Lord. How long? Have pity on your servants.

[19 : 17] Can you notice the two realities there of the psalm kind of intertwining in one verse? Return, O Lord. How long? That's the eternal reality.

That's the dwelling place for all generations in the Lord. Return. We need more of that. We need more of your eternal life and power. And then we have the dusty and rough, burdened reality next.

Have pity on us. So return, Lord. We need you. Have pity on us. We are pitiable in our frailty and sin. Look down and help us, God. Help us.

These are the two realities of the psalm. In verse 13, our call for these two realities to merge together, for God to break into our misery with hope and eternity.

Break into our reality with himself. And so first of all, that's what you and I need this year. The Lord to break into our lives that we may overcome our frailty and weakness, that we may not be burdened by wrath in this world.

[20 : 23] This is more important than resolutions and deeper than a well-planned calendar. It is a new experience of life, a life dwelling with an eternal God.

You know, my mum really feels the effects of sin and brokenness in the world. She has an illness. She can't walk or she's around in a wheelchair.

But people always comment how she is smiling and knows lots of joy, despite her disability that's been around for about 15 years. And the only reason she's able to know joy in those moments, the only way she's able to keep smiling, keep serving God and love God, is because the Lord God has broken into her life and helps her to appreciate eternity, even as she lives with the sad reality of this life of sin and wrath and illness.

There is a way to know wonderful joy and goodness this year. Even with these two realities, we need to go to the Lord, ask for his help, ask him to return. And that should really be at the top of our list, the top of the things we want to happen in the next year, next 365 days.

O Lord, return. Please be with us. And the following verses show what happens when these two realities meet, when the Lord returns and we know him.

[21 : 50] So look at verse 14 and 15. We can know lasting joy. So it says, Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. You weren't really expecting that, eh? That joy, give us joy, satisfy us in the morning.

We've just been reading about how we pass away under the wrath of God. And yet here he says, satisfy us. I want to wake up in the morning under the wrath of God, and yet experiencing the effects of sin in my body, and yet I know I can be satisfied.

I know I can have lasting joy because God is with me. There will be sad days ahead this year for us. There will be weakness and frailty and sin for us.

We don't plan for this. It just happens. We don't plan for bereavements or hospital visits or failed exams or family conflict or job losses or burnout or depression.

[22 : 58] These things happen. These things just happen to us. And our very best option when life feels like it's falling apart is to turn to God when we feel dusty and say, please satisfy me with your steadfast love.

Lord, give us joy despite the many days of affliction we have to go through. And so that might be a good resolution for the year ahead. You resolve to turn to your eternal dwelling place when you feel the dustiness of life.

You resolve to return to your eternal dwelling place when you feel the dustiness of life. And finally, and briefly, verse 16 and 17, here we see that we can have lasting works.

And not only joy, but the things we do in a short period of time really can make a difference. So verse 16, let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. Because we live with eternity in mind, we know that the actions we take here will have eternal consequences.

[24 : 13] Our life isn't kind of meaningless or futile. It has a purpose, God and eternity. For Israel, there in verse 16, Moses asked that God would continue to work in and establish his people Israel.

So they're wandering in the desert, but they say, no, we are going to come out of this. There is hope. God, keep building. Keep us alive. Keep us here until that moment.

Keep us. And they say there, work with our children. So they want to see that passed on. They want to see a lasting work within God's kingdom that will continue from one child to the next.

This is the work of God in his kingdom. This is kingdom work of eternal significance. And it ends with that double repeated line there, establish the work of our hands, establish the work of our hands.

So our work in our world of good and evil, despite our frailty and dustiness, can be lasting. It can be established. It can be purposeful when it is done with God for God's kingdom.

[25 : 19] Then it brings his favor. Sometimes our work or service doesn't seem that significant. It's clouded by kind of our weakness and our struggle and our own failure.

But if what you are doing, you are doing to serve God, what you are doing, if you're doing it with the love of God, with character and godliness, if you're thinking of how you can be a most faithful witness to the Lord Jesus in whatever you do, that people might come into his kingdom and grow, if you're thinking about how your finances and the money you're able to earn can be used to bless other people, your family, future family, your church family, to build God's kingdom.

All these things can be established, good, lasting things. Even fitness. Sometimes fitness can be maybe you think a selfish thing, but if your body isn't healthy, if you're not well, you don't really have the energy to serve God, to keep running your race before the Lord God.

So you can connect so many things actually to, I want to glorify God, so I'm going to stay fit and healthy. I want to glorify God, so I'm going to get good marks and a good job that I can be generous to others.

I'm going to glorify God by being as godly as I can before others at my workplace. And so as you step back and you say, God, I want to use these short days I have on earth, I want to use them for eternity, you can start to use every aspect of your life to establish a wonderful work in God's kingdom here.

[26 : 57] So we live with the reality of eternity and our dustiness. Do you feel that? Are you aware of that for the year ahead? Well, in light of this, just know that you can have a lasting joy from God and you can have lasting work with God when you call him, when you ask him to use you, when he breaks into your life.

So I encourage you, in the year ahead, live with those two realities. There's eternity in mind and there's our own dustiness and you need God to help. Amen, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I just pray that you would give these young minds, young hearts and young lives a wonderful wisdom from your word that outstretches their years.

Lord God, that they may walk before you and honour you. I pray that you bless them with your presence and great joy and may they do many things in this year ahead that would establish your kingdom.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.