

December 28, 2014 by Steve Brandon



# Teach Us To Number Our Days

## Psalm 90

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- 1. Our Eternal God (verses 1-4)**
- 2. Our Angry God (verses 5-11)**
- 3. Our Merciful God (verses 12-17)**

As most all of you know, we had a funeral here yesterday. Randy Robyn, who used to attend our church, passed away last week of a heart-attack. We remembered him in a service yesterday.

Now, his death was totally unexpected. He was going about his business in his home. He had a heart-attack. And he died, only to be found a few hours later by Preston, his son. He was only 54 years-old. Now, that my sound pretty old to some of you children. But, I guarantee you, 54 years-old is not that old.

And what happened to Randy could happen to any of us. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. And it may be your funeral next week. Even though you are young, you may have some heart defect that nobody knows about that can take your life tomorrow. You could die in a car accident on your way home from church. A house fire could trap you in your bedroom. You could be the innocent victim of a drive-by shooting.

Now, do I think that any of these things are going to happen to any of you this week? No. But, do I think that every one of you need to be prepared for any one of these things to happen to you this week? Yes. I do. In fact, I believe that one of my main functions as a pastor is to prepare you for the day of trial, and the biggest trial of your life may be your death. It may be your unexpected death.

We can get so caught up with our lives that they simply pass us by. I read a poem this week called, "The Parade" by Billy Collins. It goes like this:

How exhilarating it was to march  
along the great boulevards  
in the sunflash of trumpets  
and under all the waving flags—  
the flag of ambition, the flag of love.

So many of us streaming along—  
all of humanity, really—  
moving in perfect step,  
yet each lost in the room of a private dream.

How stimulating the scenery of the world,  
the rows of roadside trees,  
the huge curtain of the sky.

How endless it seemed until we veered  
off the broad turnpike  
into a pasture of high grass,  
headed toward the dizzying cliffs of mortality.

Generation after generation,  
we keep shouldering forward  
until we step off the lip into space.

And I should not have to remind you  
that little time is given here  
to rest on a wayside bench,  
to stop and bend to the wildflowers,  
or to study a bird on a branch—

not when the young  
are always shoving from behind,

not when the old keep tugging us forward,  
pulling on our arms with all their feeble strength.

There is this sweep of life that pulls and pushes us along, without us ever really thinking much about our end. As I thought about a message for this morning, I couldn't help but to preach about our end. It's especially appropriate as we await the dawning of a New Year.

Of any time of the year, the New Year is the time when we think about our lives. We make resolutions about the things that we want to change. Perhaps some weight we want to lose Perhaps some books we want to read. Perhaps some time we want to invest. These things are all good. But, the best investment you might make this New Years is to think about your life and the day of your death.

And the New Year is a perfect opportunity for us to contemplate these things. As John Piper says, "The last hours of New Year's Eve are like the ticking away of the final minutes of my time on earth. The 365 days leading to the year's end are like a miniature lifetime. ... It's a great advantage to have a trial run at my own dying every year." [\[1\]](#)

And so, I ask you, how are you spending your days? Are you satisfied with the way in which the hours tick by? Are you ready to die? How about this, are you living today in light of the day you die?

In the 1700's Jonathan Edwards put together a list of some 70 resolutions that he resolved to live by. All of them are worthy of being read and thought about. But, I want to read for you resolution #17.

17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

There is one Psalm in the Psalter that will especially help us this morning in these regards. It's Psalm 90. So, I invite you to open your Bibles to Psalm 90. This is the oldest of the Psalms that we have in the Bible. It is written by Moses. And he has a thing or two to teach us about life, having lived for 120 years, himself. It presents a contrast between the eternity of God and the short-lived life of man. And, in light of this contrast, we are called to live differently.

Psalm 90  
A prayer of Moses, the man of God

Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You return man to dust  
and say, "Return, O children of man!"  
For a thousand years in your sight  
are but as yesterday when it is past,  
or as a watch in the night.  
You sweep them away as with a flood; they are 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.

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.  
For all our days pass away under your wrath;  
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.  
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.  
Who considers the power of your anger,  
and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom.  
Return, O LORD! How long?  
Have pity on your servants!  
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.  
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! [\[2\]](#)

The key verse to this Psalm comes right in the middle: verse 12. "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." This is where I get the title of my message this morning: "Teach Us to Number Our Days."

There is something about us, which lets our days pass by, unnoticed and uncared for. We move from day to day without a care. Too often we live as if there is no eternity. Edward Payson, a great 19th century preacher, once lamented in his journal, "I act as if eternal things were a dream. When shall I be wise!" [\[3\]](#)

This is the call of verse 12. It's a call to wisdom. It's a call to know that we live in light of eternity. You know, how much time you have left changes a lot of things.

If you are playing a ball game, and time is ticking down, you play differently. If you are ahead in the game, you take your time. If you are behind in the game, you show some hustle. [\[4\]](#)

If you have a week until your term-paper is due, not a problem. You might spend your evening with your friends. But, if your term-paper is due tomorrow morning, you brew some coffee and burn the midnight oil.

And it's the same with our lives. If we truly knew how long eternity was; and if we truly knew how short our lives were, we might just live differently.

And this is how God wants us to live. Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He has put eternity into man's heart." God puts eternity in our heart, and wants us to live in light of it. And when we do, we will be wise.

When you see the end, you can persevere today. The one running the marathon will press through the pain, knowing that the end is but an hour away. The musician will practice diligently, knowing that the performance is next week. The student will study hard, knowing that his diploma awaits next year.

And with our lives, the better we number our days, the more we will live for Christ. Just think of this for a moment. Think of some sin you battle. Maybe it's anger. Maybe it's the temptation to gluttony. Maybe it's prayerlessness. Maybe it's impatience. Maybe it's some worldly pleasure.

And suppose that you knew that your days were coming to an end tomorrow. Could you stay away from that sin for a day? I think you could. Knowing that you would be meeting Jesus has a wonderful purifying effect upon your life.

Now, suppose that you knew that your days were coming to an end, three days from now. Could you stay away from that sin for three days? I think you could. You could extend that on to a week or a month or a year or a lifetime. And would we see the Lord clearly, we would walk in his ways.

Every time we sin, we demonstrate our lack of faith. Romans 1 speaks about how we will suppress the truth in order to carry out our wickedness. And would we see the LORD clearly, we would walk in His ways.

This is my heart for you this morning -- that you would see the LORD clearly; that you would number your days in 2015, and thereby live more wisely than ever before.

Let's dig into this Psalm, by looking at the first few verses. I'm calling them, ...

## 1. Our Eternal God

Psalm 90  
Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

These verses speak of the eternity of God. This is something, really, impossible to grasp. "From everlasting to everlasting" - how do you understand that? A. W. Tozer translated these words in verse 2, "From the vanishing point, to the vanishing point." [\[5\]](#)

One man has rightly suggested a way to visualize eternity. Imagine an infinitely long sheet of paper, extending off to the east and to the west, with no end in sight. That paper represents eternity. Then take a pen, and draw a short line on that piece of paper. That line represents time. And that small line doesn't represent the time of our lives. That small line represents all time, from the beginning of creation until the end of the earth as we know it.

Such is the vastness of eternity. God dwells in eternity. Or, as Isaiah 57:15 says, "[God] inhabits eternity." We, on the other hand, dwell on the line.

But, it is not as if God doesn't care for us. He does. Go back again to verse 1, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." In other words, "Though you inhabit eternity," we have found our refuge in you, who are so much bigger than we are. Though the LORD will outlive every one of us, we can find our rest in Him. Our life, by contrast, is but nothing.

We read in verse 3.

Psalm 90:3  
You return man to dust  
and say, "Return, O children of man!"

These words take us back to the garden of Eden. When Adam was created, he was formed from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). And when he fell, the Lord declared, "By the seat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). God gives life and God takes life.

David knew this very well when he said, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:16). And that's what verse 3 is speaking about. It's talking about God establishing the beginning of our lives and determining the end of them.

When Paul spoke to the Athenians on Mars Hill, he made this same point, God determines the times and boundaries of our habitation (Acts 17:26). He begins our lives. And he brings them to an end, all according to the counsel of His will.

Isaiah 46:10  
"[God declares] the end from the beginning  
and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,  
and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

God is so much bigger than our lives. Oh, church family, submit your hearts to Him. And live in light of God's eternity.

When Moses says in verse 12, "Teach us to number our days," he says first that God has already numbered our days." We simply need to walk in step with His plan for our lives. And if anything will give you purpose in this life, it is this -- that God has a plan for your life; you simply need to walk in that plan.

See, from God's perspective, our days on earth are but for a moment. Look at verse 4.

Psalm 90:4  
For a thousand years in your sight  
are but as yesterday when it is past,  
or as a watch in the night.

When God sizes up time on the earth, it seems to him but a day. It seems to him but a few hours. James tells us that our life is like a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:14). And this ought to give us a perspective on life. Our life is short. We need to learn to number our days.

But, alas, how easy it is to walk through life without thinking about our end. How easy is it to walk through life, thinking it will never end.

Moses thought about his end. Because, people were dying all around him. You don't write Psalm 90 without being familiar with death.

And in verses 5-11, we see, ....

## 2. Our Angry God (verses 5-11)

Psalm 90:5-9  
You sweep them away as with a flood; they are 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.

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.  
For all our days pass away under your wrath;  
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

Now, you need to read these verses in light of Moses. He, of course, was God's chosen instrument to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. And God used him mightily, working 10 miraculous plagues through his hand. And yet, when the people came out of the land, and came to the brink of the promised land, they balked. Rather than trusting the Lord and taking the land that He had promised to give them, they refused to enter.

I trust that you remember the story. Moses sent 12 spies into the land of Canaan. Ten of them brought back a bad report. Yes, the land flows with milk and honey, but the people are too big and too numerous. "We shouldn't go in." Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, brought back the same report, but came to a different conclusion: "We should take the land." And of course, Israel followed the ten rather than the two. And their unbelief sealed their fate.

For though they had all witnessed the powerful hand of God in Egypt, they refused to trust Him regarding the land of Canaan. And God was angry with that generation (Psalm 95:7b-11). And so, the LORD said, ...

Numbers 14:29-30

your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

And so, over the next 40 years, the LORD began to strike down the unbelieving people. And so, Moses could write in verse 5, ...

Psalm 90:5-6

You sweep them away as with a flood; they are 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.

And that continues on through today. With a population of 7 billion people in the world, about 150,000 people die every day. [\[6\]](#) Indeed, God sweeps through this earth like a flood. And the grass that flourishes in the morning withers by the evening. And such is our life as well. None of us will escape the fading glory of this life.

And when it came to Israel, they perished in God's wrath. Verse 7, ...

Psalm 90:7-9

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.  
For all our days pass away under your wrath;  
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

God saw their sin, and they were punished accordingly. God sees our sin. Verse 8, ...

Psalm 90:8

You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.

The secret sin on earth is the scandalous sin in heaven. There is nothing hidden from God. But, all things are open and laid bare before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:12).

Any more life that God gives us is a gift of His grace. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We deserve to die. But, God, in His grace, gives us years to live and enjoy him. In fact, he gives seventy or eighty. Verse 10, ...

Psalm 90:10

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.

Though our life expectancy has been on the rise for the past century, these words are as true today as they were 3,500 years ago. A typical person may live up to seventy years. Some live to eighty. Now, certainly, there are even some exceptions beyond this. In fact, I saw in the Rockford Register Start this past week that the C. Conrad Johnson, a Rockford resident and the man recognized as the oldest in the United States, died Tuesday morning (5 days ago). He was 110 years, 338 days old. He "attributed his long life to eating a bowl of oatmeal every morning and getting plenty of exercise." [\[7\]](#)

And there are exceptions on the lower end as well. Randy Robyn never made it to 70. And there are plenty who die even younger than he did. A man in our congregation read this week of how a grade-school classmate of his died this week. He was 62 years-old. But, the rule still stands. Seventy, maybe eighty years. And then, our lives are gone. And the older you get, the more this comes home to you.

I'm more than half-way there. And I realize, more than ever, how quickly the time passes by. Yet, still, I need Psalm 90. I need the reminders. And I trust that you need the reminders as well. In fact, I know you do, because of the question in verse 11, ...

Psalm 90:11  
Who considers the power of your anger,  
and your wrath according to the fear of you?

This is a rhetorical question, meaning that the answer is obvious. None of us really considers and understands the full power of God's anger and wrath. And so, that's why verse 12 is a prayer. "Teach us to number our days." Because few of us really do this. And the only ones who do are the ones taught by God.

So, don't think this morning that my exhortation to you to number your days will happen on your own strength. It's only going to come if God gives it. It's only going to come if God teaches us these things. In fact, such is the conclusion of this Psalm. It concludes with prayer requests.

In verses 12-17, I count ten prayer requests. And they all place us under God's mercy, which is my final point. We have seen Our Eternal God (verses 1-4), Our Angry God (verses 5-11), and now we come to ...

### **3. Our Merciful God (verses 12-17)**

As I read, count the prayer requests.

Psalm 90:12-17  
So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom.  
Return, O LORD! How long?  
Have pity on your servants!  
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.  
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!

Let's just work through the ten prayer requests.

1. Teach us to number our days (verse 12). We have seen that one.
2. Return, O LORD(verse 13). This is a prayer for revival. It calls God to return to us.
3. Have pity on your servants (verse 13). This is a cry for mercy. This is a cry for help. This is a cry for compassion. We bring nothing to God, but our begging His mercy. That's how we come to Christ, simply pleading for His mercy to our souls.
4. Satisfy us with your steadfast love (verse 14). It's here that the true light of the gospel shines forth. God's "steadfast love" is the enduring, faithful love that He has for His people. It's best shown in the love of Christ, who loved us and gave Himself up for us and for our sins. And the prayer request here is for joy in God and joy in the gospel.

I know that my message has been doom and gloom, for such has been much of this Psalm. But, there is joy! It is joy in God's faithful love toward us in Christ Jesus.

5. Make us glad (verse 15). Here, Moses sort of makes a deal with the LORD. He says that the life of Israel has been a life of sorrow and pain and distress. But, the request is that God would be gracious and return the days of sorrow for days of gladness. He was praying for 40 years of gladness. And God answered that prayer, for they enjoyed a generation in the land under the leadership of Joshua.
6. Show your work (verse 16a). The people of Israel had seen the mighty workings of God. This was a prayer for more of the same.
7. Show your glorious power (verse 16b). Moses wanted the children of Israel to see and know the power of God.
8. Let your favor be upon us (verse 17a). Again, this is a simple prayer for mercy.
9. Establish the work of our hands (verse 17b).

10. Establish the work of our hands (verse 17c). Again, you see mercy in this request. Rather than being consumed in God's wrath, Moses prayed for God to work through those in Israel.

All ten requests are prayers for mercy. We saw God's mercy at the beginning of the Psalm, allowing us to dwell with Him. We have found God's mercy at the end of the Psalm -- that God would give us our satisfaction and joy in Him.

This gives us Our Eternal God (verses 1-4), Our Angry God (verses 5-11), and Our Merciful God (verses 12-17).

As I wrap up my message this morning, I want for you to take out your hymnals. In recent weeks, we have been looking at various Christmas Hymns. How appropriate for us to take our hymnal and turn to hymn #686. "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." If you look at the bottom of the hymn, you will see that it was written by Isaac Watts. And if you read further, you will see that it was his rendition of Psalm 90.

Again, this is one of those hymns that he worked over, that they might be sung more easily in the Christian Church. I want for us to read through this hymn, and see how it paraphrases Psalm 90. And then, I want to conclude our service this morning by singing it together.

Our God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home. (verse 1).

Under the shadow of Thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,  
And our defense is sure. (verse 1)

Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting Thou art God,  
To endless years the same. (verse 2)

Thy Word commands our flesh to dust,  
"Return, ye sons of men:"  
All nations rose from earth at first,  
And turn to earth again. (verse 3)

A thousand ages in Thy sight  
Are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night  
Before the rising sun. (verse 4)

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,  
With all their lives and cares,  
Are carried downwards by the flood,  
And lost in following years. (verse 5)

Time, like an ever rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day. (verse 6)

Like flowery fields the nations stand  
Pleased with the morning light;  
The flowers beneath the mower's hand  
Lie withering ere 'tis night. (verse 6)

Our God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,  
And our eternal home. (verses 12-17)

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 28, 2014 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] John Piper, "Future Grace," p. 311.

[2] Billy Collins, "The Parade," included in Good Poems for Hard Times, selected and introduced by Garrison Keillor, pp. 221-222.

[3] Edward Payson, "Memoir," chapter 3, p. 67.

[4] If you have ever witnessed a soccer match, you know how players often will fall to the ground, screaming and wincing as if they were in some great pain. However, after a short period of time, these players will often get up in full sprint and play on as if they had never been injured.

In June 2014, the Wall Street Journal carried an interesting article written by Geoff Foster entitled, "The World Cup Flopping Rankings." (You can read it here: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-world-rankings-of-flopping-1403660175>). The article brings forth the results of a study of 32 World Cup matches. In these matches, "there were 302 players who could be seen at some point rolling around in pain, crumpling into a fetal position or lying lifeless on the pitch as the referee stopped the match. These theatrical episodes ate up a total of 132 minutes of clock, a metric we have decided to call "writhing time."

The times were summed up and analyzed. Here's the summary of the findings (which emphasizes my point in the message):

The study showed one thing emphatically: The amount of histrionics your players display during a match correlates strongly to what the scoreboard says. Players on teams that were losing their games accounted for 40 "injuries" and nearly 12.5 minutes of writhing time. But players on teams that were winning—the ones who have the most incentive to run out the clock—accounted for 103 "injuries" and almost four times as much writhing.

[5] A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 39.

[6] <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

[7] <http://www.rstar.com/article/20141223/News/141229679>