

*A prayer of Moses the man of God.*

- <sup>1</sup> *Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
- <sup>3</sup> *You turn men back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."*
- <sup>4</sup> *For a thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.*
- <sup>5</sup> *You sweep men away in the sleep of death;  
they are like the new grass of the morning—*
- <sup>6</sup> *though in the morning it springs up new,  
by evening it is dry and withered.*
- <sup>7</sup> *We are consumed by your anger  
and terrified by your indignation.*
- <sup>8</sup> *You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.*
- <sup>9</sup> *All our days pass away under your wrath;  
we finish our years with a moan.*
- <sup>10</sup> *The length of our days is seventy years—  
or eighty, if we have the strength;  
yet their span is but trouble and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Who knows the power of your anger?  
For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Teach us to number our days aright,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Relent, O LORD! How long will it be?  
Have compassion on your servants.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,  
for as many years as we have seen trouble.*
- <sup>16</sup> *May your deeds be shown to your servants,  
your splendor to their children.*
- <sup>17</sup> *May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us;  
establish the work of our hands for us—  
yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90)*

**How Should We Number our Days?**

When I was about the same age that my children are now, my dad started saying, "I think the world spins faster every year." Of course, his point was that time seemed to be flying. I used shrug my shoulders at his comment because I was at a point in my life when I was still waiting for things – waiting for my enlistment in the army to end, waiting to graduate from college, waiting to find a wife and start real life. It didn't seem to

me then like time was flying at all. I didn't understand then that my dad was looking back at things like raising children and building a career, things that take years, and those things were past. Now, of course, I have a very different perspective. Even though I can remember when it seemed like we were going to be dealing with school issues and pediatricians and stuff like that forever, we're largely done with all that now, and it's hard to believe it's over. And sometimes, I have those moments when it really does seem like it flew by. That perspective is reflected in Psalm 90. I don't know how old Moses was when he wrote this psalm, but he reflects on how short our lives are. He asks God to teach us to number our days aright so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. As we prepare to end another year on this earth, it's a good time for us to consider the question: **how should we number our days?**

Moses says, **"Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."** The part of this verse that might jump out at us is the part about God's eternity: before the mountains were born, God was there. From everlasting to everlasting, he is God. "Eternal" means having no beginning and no ending. God was always there. He will always be there. But don't miss the other thing Moses says: **"You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations."** Moses applies that eternity of God to his love for us. God has always been our dwelling place, our home. Home is where you feel safe. It's where you're taken care of. With God, we are safe. We are provided for. God has always been that for us.

Only after he says all that, does Moses start to talk about numbering our days down here on this earth. Down here, our days are short. God turns us back to dust. We die and unless the funeral director douses us with a good measure of embalming fluid, these bodies will rot away. But God is different. To God a thousand years are like a day that has just gone by. Think of how long that is for us. Do you know what was happening a thousand years ago? The year 1018 was almost five hundred years before Columbus discovered America. In 1018, the king of England was Cnut the Great. Ever hear of him? In 1018, it would've been impossible to imagine America and the lives we lead, our smart phones and cars and leisure time. Yet to God, it was yesterday. He's watched us human beings live and die by the billions. Yet he endures.

But we don't. And God decides when we die. But there's only one reason we have to die at all: our sin. Moses says, **"We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence."** The penalty for sin is death. God even sees our secret sins. That's important for people like us who get to church regularly. Most of us don't advertise our sins. We keep them to ourselves. We like the reputation of being "the good people." We may even conceal the depths of our sin from ourselves. We tell ourselves that we're not like those people out there and if everyone were as good as we are, the world would be a better place. But God knows our secret sins. God sees the things we manage to hide even from ourselves. Do you know how you can tell that Moses was right? We're dying. Every single one of us is dying and death is the punishment for sin. It's what God does to people who disobey him. It's going to happen to us, too, because we are sinners.

Now it might not happen tonight. Moses says, **"The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty, if we have the strength."** 70 or 80 years might seem like a good long life to us. We probably even know some people who've "had the strength" even to reach their 90's or beyond. But what is that compared to eternity? And Moses continues **"yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away."** When you look back at life, it's always going to seem like it flew by, even if you live to be one hundred. And how much of it hurt? How much disappointment did we face and how many defeats did we endure? To number our days aright, we have to see them in the light of God and his eternity, of God and his judgment.

But is that all that there is? No. Sin destroys our world and ages our bodies and steals joy from every one of us. But sin is not the defining characteristic of our lives because God has been our dwelling place through all generations. He was there when we were born. He will be there when we die. And his love will never fail us. As Moses writes, **"Relent, O 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."** Even in this life, there is a solution to pain: God's unfailing love. He hears our prayers. Again and again, he rescues us from sorrow and loss and death. Even when he calls home those we love, he heals us with the promise of the resurrection. Today may hurt, but tomorrow we will see things differently. God will satisfy us even here with his unfailing love. He will teach us to sing for joy and be glad all our days.

How does he do that? By teaching us about Jesus. Jesus came and defeated our sin and gave us eternal life. He takes us home to heaven where we will be free from all pain and sorrow. When he returns he will gather up the dust that was our bodies and raise us from the dead. He will remove all that hurts and give us a perfect world where we will know only joy. By a miracle of God's grace, he gives us that joy already now. He reaches out from heaven and touches our hearts with that gospel promise and he heals us even here. He gives us a reason to sing even during this short and painful life.

That changes the way we number our days. For us, every day that we are here is a day in God's love. As 2018 fades away into 2019, God gives us another year of his grace and mercy. What will happen to you and me this year? Who won't be with us on the next New Year's Eve? Only God knows. But he will be with us. Every day that he gives us with each other is a gift of his love. And every one of his children that he calls home gets to live with him in joy, while he or she waits for Jesus to bring them back.

That resurrection is the greatest gift of love we can get. The truth is, there might be more pain than joy in 2019. If some terrible tragedy befalls your family, you might remember the coming year as the worst year of your life. If your sin or my sin gets the better of us this year, we might wrestle with guilt and shame for years to come. But no matter what happens this year, Jesus will still be with us. He will walk with us every step of the way. He will hear every prayer we offer. He will carry us through every tragedy and even every joy to bring us home to heaven. So we count every day in this life as a day on the way home.

But while we live here and wait to go home, God does not call us to disengage from this life. He calls us to work and care for our families. He calls us to love our neighbor and honor our spouse and give thanks for parents and children. He calls us to work for the good of the church and to be positive influences in our society. He calls us to be examples of faithful service in our jobs, and to be the kind of employee that the boss doesn't have to constantly check on. In all those things, Moses writes, **"May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands."**

What will make us successful in the coming year? Hard work? Discipline? Talent? Yes, certainly. But never forget who truly prospers the work of our hands. God blesses our efforts – our efforts to parent and to care for elderly parents, our efforts to support our families and to help our neighbors, our efforts to be good citizens and faithful friends. All those things depend on God's help. And let's not forget our efforts to share the gospel. God blesses those, too. All that our church undertakes – the instruction of our children, the spiritual care of the sick and the elderly, the outreach to the lost – all of it depends on the blessing of God.

Why does he bless us? Because he loves us. We don't deserve it, but the favor of the Lord our God rests on us. Now, you can't always see that from how well our lives are going. Sometimes, God allows hardships and challenges to come to us because those things are good for us. But they don't feel good. If you're struggling with a severe illness, it doesn't feel like a blessing. If someone you love is hurting, their pain doesn't feel like a good thing. But God promises that even in those hurts and sorrows, he is working for our good. How do we know that's true? Because this is the God who took human flesh and died for us. If he loved us that much, he will never leave us. He will never let anything touch us here that doesn't bring us closer to heaven. This is the God who conquered death for us. He rose. And if he can defeat sin and death, he can defeat all they do to us here. Nothing is outside his power. No problem is beyond his solving.

Psalm 90 reminds me of a young man that I roomed with at the seminary. He took a year off to travel and he went to Australia to visit a friend who was serving a church there. They went swimming in the ocean one day and he got caught in the undertow and died. We had service for him in the seminary chapel and one of the professors used this psalm to remind us that God is greater than death. Our time here is brief and full of pain. But then we see Jesus. We will live with him in joy forever. Tonight we mark the end and the beginning of one more year on our brief journey here, one more year of God's love here, one year closer to home and to Jesus. Amen.