

Living A Life That Counts

Psalm 90:1-17

Series: The Psalms [#23]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

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Theme: **Count Your Days So That Your Life Will Count.**

Introduction

Psalm 90 was written by Moses and is the oldest of the Psalms. While he wrote it over 3,400 years ago, it is up to date. It deals with the broad subject of the meaning and value of life and specifically, with how to live a life that really counts. I don't know about you, but I have never talked with or heard about anyone who wants to waste their life. Yet, that is exactly what many people fear — that his or her life doesn't really count, that all their time and efforts are wasted. A nineteenth century poet tells us,

A wasted life! This sad refrain
Comes surging through my ears again;
There's no escape from thee, though [*sic*] fiend,
Thou art borne to me on every wind —
A wasted life! A wasted life!¹

These thoughts and feelings are echoed by many today as they look at themselves, their relationships, their work, at what they have accomplished. They think, "All that I've done really doesn't amount to anything. It doesn't count. I don't really count. I've wasted my life." And it is not limited to people in mid-life crisis or their senior years. A 14 year-old describes anxiety, losing joy and friends, not being able to talk with or be understood by family, and says "now I feel like I've wasted my life." At fourteen.

Many different experiences and factors can lead us to thinking we have wasted our lives. Psalm 90 does not explore those, but it does to go the heart of *how to live a life that counts*. A key, lynchpin statement to understanding this Psalm and *to living a life that counts* is verse 12. "So [God] teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." God tells us through Moses, "*Count your days so that your life will count.*" But what does it mean to *count our days and so live wisely? How do we do that?* Let's explore this. It involves taking three different looks. First,

Look Beyond Yourself—Recognize That God Really Exists.

This begins with a view and acceptance of facts. The Bible tells us that God is, that He always has been and always will be. It also tells us that He created all that exists. Look at the opening lines of this Psalm.

“Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” (1-2)

The first words in the Bible, Genesis 1:1, tell us “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God existed prior to “the beginning,” prior to time and space as we know it. Eternal God created the heavens and the earth, all that exists.

Moving forward to Psalm 102, we read, “Of old You [God] founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands” (25). When we turn to the New Testament, John chapter 1 speaks of *the Word*, that is, eternal God the Son, Jesus Christ.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (1-3)

The apostle Paul builds on this in Colossians 1:16-17,

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

More than that, the Bible tells us that God the Creator designed us to know and rely on Him. So Moses wrote here, “You [God] have been our dwelling place in all generations” (1). Move ahead to the next Psalm, Psalm 91. It begins,

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust!’” (1-2)

Moses’ final words to Israel before he died were beautiful and precious as he told them they would go ahead without him, the only leader they had known. “The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27a). These facts of the Bible are foundational, they are part of a view of who we are and how we fit into creation that leads to living a life that counts.

These facts of the Bible line up with what we see around us. The order, design, complexity and delicate balances in the universe point to God the Creator. I won’t cite details here, but simply remind us that the facts of the Bible are reinforced by the facts we can observe. There is much we can neither understand or explain, but what we can point us to God the Creator.

Whatever amount of knowledge and understanding we have, the fundamental change point from a life wasted to a life that counts is placing our trust, our faith in God. Think of Moses. The inscription of the Psalm is “A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.” His trust was in God. Moses faced many challenges, complete with joys and pains, victories and defeats. He was born into a humble Israeli family when they were in slavery in Egypt. He was adopted, raised and trained by royalty to be a ruler. He was troubled by the oppression of his people. He was brash, taking their cause into his own hands and murdered an oppressive Egyptian taskmaster. He had learned about God since childhood because his mother was hired by the court to care for him. Somewhere along the way he came to know God—not just about God, but to know God. He made the decision to place his trust in Him.

God was gracious. He appointed Moses to lead the people out of slavery—over his protests. He led them for forty years—much of the time it was more like herding cats than sheep. The people were prone to not trusting, to complaining and rebelling. After all the ups and downs, Moses recognized, he knew with certainty the reality of the personal, loving, eternal God. More than that, He trusted Him. He trusted God as God revealed Himself to be, and God proved to be true and faithful to him. Because of his view and life of faith, Moses experienced God as his dwelling place, his hiding place, his shelter, his all wise-counselor, and his powerful deliverer.

God is willing and waiting to prove Himself faithful and true to you. He will as you look beyond yourself and to Him. He will as you accept His truth, place your trust in Him as He reveals Himself to be in the Bible. It is not a matter of what I think or feel about God and how I can and should trust Him. The apostle John wrote in his gospel, 1:12-13,

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

It is totally by Gods grace through faith, as the apostle Paul made clear in Ephesians 2,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” (8-10)

The writer of Hebrews sums it up clearly,

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (11:6).

When we do this God will also make our lives count now and for eternity as we *count our days* in this way.

Look within Yourself—Realize Your Limitations.

The second of these three looks is to look within yourself and realize your limitations. This can be difficult. The three limitations Moses zeroes in on in this Psalm can be very difficult for us to face. The first one is the slightness of your strength. Physical strength probably comes to mind here. We face declining strength as we get older. This is a concern for many people. About a third of the respondents to a survey said their biggest fear of aging is that they won't be able to take care of themselves, while only about seven percent said their biggest fear of aging is looking old and wrinkly. In line with that, almost sixty percent said their biggest priority as they age is staying strong and healthy.²

While Moses' words on the slightness of strength include this, they cut a much wider swath. Let's pick it up at verse 3.

“You turn man back into dust and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; in the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; toward evening it fades and withers away.” (3-6)

Yes, we live longer on average. The percent of the population over age 65 has gone from about 4% to 13% in the last one hundred years.³ But, as we are reminded from time to time, the death rate remains unchanged at 100%. Yes, there have been great achievements and advances in the last century. But after it is all said and done, our slightness of strength is constant. We still age, we still fade, we still get sick, we still wear out and we still die. Our lives pass by all too quickly. King David wrote in Psalm 103,

“For He [God] Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer.” (14-16)

And we can't change any of this. So, King Solomon opened his graphic description of aging in Ecclesiastes 12 with

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’” and, from a purely earth-centered perspective, he concluded it with “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘all is vanity!’” (1, 8)

The next limitation to come to terms with is even more sobering— the sinfulness of your nature. The word *sin* is not popular among many people. For some it is politically incorrect to talk about *sin*. For others it is not important because they think it is an outdated idea, or because they do not understand how serious sin is. So we talk about mistakes, about not

living up to our potential, about not having the best outcomes — all of which have a place— but not about *sin*. We continue at verse 7.

“For we have been consumed by Your anger and by Your wrath we have been dismayed. You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence.” (7-8)

The starting place here is the holiness of God. God is pure, true, righteous and holy. He cannot look the other way at sin. Being the holy Sovereign, He must, does, and will judge all sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they plunged all their descendants into sin. That includes us. We inherited a sinful nature from them and we sin—we choose to do what we think is best, what we want to do, even when it flies in the face of God and His truth.

God takes all sin seriously. In Psalm 5:5-6 King David tells us,

“The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.”

Then in Psalm 14,

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.” (1-3)

King Solomon’s final lines in Ecclesiastes are

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.” (12:13-14)

Yes, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6a). Yes, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). This is not *feel good* truth, but it *is* truth we need to know, accept and have in focus if we are to live lives that count.

We need to realize our limitations. The limitation of the slightness of our strength, of the sinfulness of our nature and, finally, of the shortness of our lives. We touched on this earlier. Verses 9-12 bring it front and center. Moses writes,

“For all our days have declined in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. 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. Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.”

The word *number* or *count* in verse 12 is generally translated in the Bible as *to count* or *to number*, *to appoint*. It also was used to refer to taking stock, balancing the books, reflecting and analyzing.

We need to take stock, to get an accurate view of the fact that our life on earth is short—whether it be a few or many years by our measure. There never is a point when we can think, “I’ve got a long way to go. I can get serious later. For now, I want to enjoy myself.” Or, “I’m busy trying to get established. Once that’s done, there will be plenty of time to think about God and what it takes or means to follow Him.”

The people of Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness even though He provided for their needs. “So,” Psalm 78 tells us, God “brought their days to an end in *futility* and their years in sudden terror” (33). They, like many people today, thought their present situation was more important than trusting, following and worshiping God right now.

Another thing to remember as our lives move onward quickly, is that the present moment, the present opportunity, the present blessings, the present challenge is all we have with certainty. There is no guarantee of tomorrow, whatever our age. There also is the danger of forming deep ruts of going our own way that will be much more difficult than we think to get out of at some later point. But, as we do understand and follow God by faith, He turns that into wisdom, into being able to see things, to put things together as they really are. From the negative side, we cannot truly count our days, reckon them, put them in an accurate perspective, unless we realize the limitation of the shortness of our lives.

Look To God—Receive His Grace.

Counting our days so that our lives will count includes looking beyond ourselves to recognize that God really exists, looking within ourselves to realize our limitations, and also looking to God to receive His grace. Looking to God and receiving His grace begins with consciously, deliberately seeking God’s presence in our lives.

Moses reached out to God in his time of need. Look at verse 13. “Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants.” We don’t know when he wrote this Psalm, what the conditions were around him, how the people were responding to his leadership, nor his on focus on God. When he speaks to God about “Your *servants*,” and continues the plural in the next verses, it is clear he was praying for the nation as well as himself. King David expressed the same desire in a number of his Psalms. For example, 63:1,

“O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

The sad, tragic reality is that some people are not seeking God in any way, even misguided and false ways. There is a lot of religion in our world. There are many people who are trying to please God, or their concept of God or gods, on their own. There are people who make their own patchwork quilt religion—a little piece from here, another from there, all stitched together.

Looking to God and genuinely seeking after Him opens the door to receiving His grace—receiving His forgiveness of our sins, His everlasting life, His love and joy. Let’s pick it up at verse 14.

“O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen evil. Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children. 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.” (14-17)

You see, Moses’ earnest prayer and expectation was for here and now, not only for after life on earth in heaven with God. He longed for the deep satisfaction from God’s love being poured on him that then would overflow with ongoing joyful praise. He yearns to see the majesty of what God is doing here and now in his world, in his world out there in the desert. He desires God’s favor *to confirm the work of his hands*—to put His approval on and to firmly establish his work. By faith he not only desires, but he knows God will make his life count now and for eternity.

In short, your life, my life will not really count unless we receive God’s grace in Jesus Christ—God the Son eternal who became one of us so as the perfect Lamb of God He could pay for our sin with His death on the cross.

He is the way, there is no other.

“as many as received *Him*,” the apostle John wrote, “to them He [Christ] gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in *His* name.” (John 1:12)

He is the way, there is no other.

“*He Himself* bore our sins in His body on the cross,” the apostle Peter wrote, “so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by *His* wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:24-25)

He is the way, there is no other.

Jesus Himself declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6)

He is the way, there is no other.

Peter preached, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

He is the way, there is no other.

The apostle John summed it up, “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” (1 John 5:11-12)

Conclusion.

Do you want to live a life that counts? Count your days so that your life will count. Count your days, reckon them, put them in the light of God’s perfect perspective by looking beyond yourself and recognizing that God really exists, by looking within yourself and realizing your limitations, by looking to God and receiving His grace in Jesus Christ.

If you have never come to God on His terms, confessed your sinfulness and sins to Him, received His grace of full forgiveness and life, God is speaking to you today through these words of Moses written 3,400 years ago. Do not delay. You may know all that you need to know to make a decision. Make that decision now, in these next quiet moments. You may have questions. Make sure you talk with me, Pastor Tyler or someone else before you leave this morning.

You may have already come to God through Christ, but you may be, as we noted in Psalm 23 last week, a sheep wandering away on your own. Whether you are a teenager looking forward to the many years that you see ahead and thinking you have plenty of time to get serious about your relationship with God, or a *middleager* realizing you have been wasting time and opportunities to enjoy God’s grace and make your life count, or a *keenager* looking back over many years and thinking you’ve blown it, it’s too late God is also speaking to you through these 3,400 year-old words from Moses. Don’t delay. It’s not too soon. It’s not too late. Start making your life count today. Talk it over with God. Pour out your heart to Him in these next moments.

Yes, it may be very uncomfortable to move out of your pattern. Perhaps there are things you know you should be doing, that God wants you to do. But you haven’t trusted God to enable you. Or, there may be some things that are not as they should be. You haven’t

wanted to face, confess and turn from some things that do not please God. You haven't trusted Him to take care of you, to bring good things to you if step out in faith and follow, obey Him.

When the Berlin Wall came down, a North American living in Germany wrote to his friends about some people from East Germany who walked into the Western section and saw how much nicer and better it was, but went back to what they knew. They weren't all that happy there. They didn't have hope for a better life in the future. But they were afraid of change. They didn't trust this different way. So they sacrificed what was there for them to receive because of their fear.

Don't do that, never do that in your spiritual life. Trust God to establish what you do as you follow Him. Count on Him to bless you and to enable you to live a life that counts now and forever. *Praise God* for His amazing grace to *you*, and step out to follow Him in faith! Then, if you made a decision about some things in your life, make sure you tell someone about your decision to really walk by faith, not by sight.

¹ Melinda Kendall. *A Wasted Life*. <<http://melindakendall.wordpress.com/poem-a-wasted-life/>>. Accessed 28 September 2010.

² *Bigger aging worries than wrinkles, readers say*. <<http://www.msnbc.com/id/21279474/ns/health-aging/>>. Accessed 29 September 2010.

³ Michael G. Bemben. "The physiology of aging: what you can do to slow or stop the loss of muscle mass - Research," *Imoneywatch.com*. <accessed 29 September 2010>.

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