

# Number Your Days

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Preacher: Steven Miller

[ 0 : 00 ] A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever 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 70, or even by a reason of strength 80. Yet their span is but toil and trouble.

[ 1 : 12 ] 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. A common argument for the moral benefits of not believing in God and not believing in afterlife is that death will be more meaningful because our time is short and there's no other opportunity.

And so if I only have 80 years total rather than 80 years plus all eternity, it would change directly how I make decisions, what voice I use, different things like that. Carl Sagan, who's a popular astronomer, who's somewhere between atheist and agnostic, said at one point, I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue.

[ 2 : 29 ] But as much as I want to believe that, and despite the ancient and worldwide cultural traditions of a certain afterlife, I know of nothing to suggest that it is more than wishful thinking. But if death is nothing more than endless, dreamless sleep, this is a forlorn hope.

Maybe this perspective has given me a little extra motivation to stay alive. The world is so exquisite with so much love and moral depth that there is no reason to deceive ourselves with pretty stories for which there is little good evidence. Far better, it seems to me, in our vulnerability, is to look death in the eye and be grateful every day for the brief but magnificent opportunity that life provides.

I think that this is a reasonable idea, but I think that it's one that's been co-opted from Christianity. And I think that often we think that Christianity disagrees with this in saying that everlasting life makes you more joyful and you don't have to worry about death.

But I think Solt 90 kind of stares that in the face and says that we actually gain wisdom by considering and numbering our days. And Christianity actually agrees with the general line of thought that Carl seconds on, that counting our days leads to more wisdom.

And the question is, why does morbosus reflecting on mortality benefit a Christian? Okay. So in Solt 90, we're just considering, like, why does the morbosus of death, like, and reflecting on that really benefit us as Christians?

[ 3 : 58 ] And I think that the answer that the psalm gives is that reflecting on the sobriety of death gives fear of God. And that comes from both considering God's eternity, that he's always existed and always will, and also his judgment as well.

And so the first half of the psalm alternates between reflecting on God's eternity and judgment. There are many contrasts showing things that last a long time versus things that don't. So it starts out in verse 1 and says, God is a dwelling place for generations.

So thinking of multiple people living in the same place. So, like, through death, he continues. It's pretty explicit in verse 2 that God exists before people do. From before we were created, God was there.

Mountains, which are kind of a longstanding legacy and not something that changes very frequently, are compared to God, while men are compared to grass that waste away, basically. So, like, grass in a dry area that would wither up quickly.

And the final comparison to verse 4 is sort of that, you know, a thousand years, which is roughly 10 to 15 generations of a family, is but a night or a passing memory in God's mind.

[ 5 : 04 ] Like, it just flies by. It's nothing. And I think, you know, man, in contrast to all this eternity in verse 10 is laid out to live a life of at most 70 or 80 years.

This is kind of a normal lifespan for us just because of medical advances. But back in Moses' time, that would have been a pretty big feat to live that long. It would have been, like, living to 100 or something like that.

So I think that he's pushing it and saying, you know, this is the most we can live, and it's still not very much, which I think is true, whether it's 80 or 100, honestly. And I think that there's the reflection on the temporality of man, but there's also just intertwined with that the reflection that, you know, the fact that we're temporary is not normal.

It's actually a curse on us. And so Moses weaves in talking about sin, and it's in God's wrath against it. But so we find in the years fly quickly by in verse 4 because in verse 5 God sweeps them away as a flood, like a quickly fading dream.

We die in verse 8 because our iniquities are set before God. This is very much calling back to Genesis when man fell, and when man was created, man was created eternal.

[ 6 : 17 ] And when Adam brought sin into the world, then temporality was introduced. And so death and judgment are very closely intertwined here. And all of this culminates in a question.

Who considers the power of your, in verse 11, who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? And I think that the answer of that question is kind of like someone who considers God does, right?

But kind of the subtext of that is like we don't instinctively stop to consider that. Like he's kind of asking the question because it's not something people instinctively consider. I don't think that we stop to consider bad circumstances unless they're right in front of us, just humanly speaking.

It's really not natural to process things that are far off. If a car is about to run you over, you're going to jump out of the way. But if you're in the first half of your life, you might not spend much time at all thinking about the fact that you're going to die eventually.

And then when it faces us, when we do face death, different people use different phrases to kind of soften it. So you hear phrases like death with dignity, like making a choice in your death, for those that might not believe in everlasting life.

[ 7 : 23 ] Or, you know, a Christian phrase I hear a lot is just kind of like, I'm passing through this life into another so I don't have to worry about too much. And I think that the problem with both of those is that they sidestep the instruction of verse 12 that says teach us to number our days.

And the instruction of verse 11 that says consider the power of God's anger and his wrath. I think that facing the truth is a good thing. I think that we all implicitly know that.

If you think about kind of careers that you, or careers that get the genre or the veneer of respect versus those that don't. So journalists are usually considered universally good because they expose things that are not good and they help bring justice.

Because we, consulting, a good consultant usually will say things even if they're not what the person wants to hear at the time. You pay somebody to consult you so that you can hear the things you don't see.

You might not like it, but that's truth and that's a good thing. Careers like being a politician or a lawyer, where the stigma is that the truth is manipulated to make things happen, are generally frowned upon.

[ 8 : 27 ] Similar if you sell something, right? I think that you're just motivated just to sell something to me. I don't think that you're being honest with me. And so I think that we know that the truth is good even when it doesn't sit well with us necessarily.

Hearing the right thing is good. And I think that when we consider and hear the right thing that our days are numbered, it gives us integrity, right?

We're being honest with ourselves. And it's also self-beneficial. It brings about that wisdom that God gives. It gives us a clear mind to make decisions on things. And I think that kind of shows up in verse 12.

So having reflected on human mortality and kind of the facts of life really informs how Moses prays for himself and for God's people. And so his prayer is really grounded in everything he's reflected on previously that's just kind of true about humanity.

He says, you know, he asked for a special favor to be satisfied in the morning in verse 14 and not wither, basically, but rejoice in all days.

[ 9 : 30 ] So like earlier on, it says like the grass grows up in the morning, but then it withers later in the day. Moses specifically prays like give us that nourishment in the morning, but continue it with us for the rest of our lives. He asked in verse 15 to make us glad for as many days as you've afflicted us, which is kind of implied as many days afflicted in life.

And back in verse 10, we talk about toil and trouble. He asked to see in verse 16, he asked to see God's glorious power. Just earlier on, it's, you know, God's power is also what powers his anger.

But he asked from that, no, show me your power. Let me consider these things rightly. Let me see all of who you are, God. And then in verse 17, he asked for his works to be established like God is, honestly.

So when he says, you know, establish the work of our hands upon us, he's saying, you know, I want to do things. God, I want you to take our work and bring it past the point where I'm alive, like to affect future generations.

Because we don't survive for future generations, but our good influence or the deeds that we do might last past that with God's favor. And so he specifically asked for that. And so I think that one benefit that shows up here initially is that clarity of death gives us clarity in conversing with God.

[ 10 : 39 ] In James, it says the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. And I think that it takes being righteous is being in the right or being just. And it takes both integrity of thought as well as integrity of action to pray justly.

And so since death is a real thing and it happens to all of us, I think that there's implication that this prayer is informed by that and powerful because of that, because he's stopping to reflect on reality.

That same verse in James where it says the prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective talks about Elijah who prayed for a drought for three and a half years and it did not rain for three and a half years.

And then when no one thought it was going to rain again, he was able to pray and it started raining again. And so I think that that clarity of thinking rightly provides us those righteous prayers and allows God to provide for us.

And I think that verse 17 also points towards kind of the Christian answer to the brevity of life and life being short. So we might think that if we didn't believe in an afterlife, we would be more motivated to achieve well in this life because our time is limited.

[ 11 : 46 ] But I think that that assumes that the 80 years here don't carry the effect that they do. I think it's pretty clear in the Bible that the actions that we take carry over into heaven.

There's many spots where it talks about people being honored for what they've done or parables where someone's given five talents and they produce five more. And so when God welcomes into his kingdom, which is kind of implying death at that point, he says, I'm blessing you for the work that you've done.

And so I think that we often kind of hear the phrase, like I'm just passing through or like I'm not taking anything with me. And like that's typical, can be typical Christian speak. I think that that, I think we actually take a lot with us.

And I think that it kind of, C.S. Lewis talks about an idea of like transposition, that things that we create here will almost be recreated in heaven.

And so the good that we do, that God carries that over and honors that and sees that. I would always illustrate this with when I would do youth group lessons, I would have a kid draw like in a minute their favorification spot or something like that.

[ 12 : 50 ] And so I'd be like, okay, you got to hold it up now. And it's like, you know, a really bad drawing of a cabin by a mountain or something like that. And I'm like, what is that? They're like, well, that's the cabin by the mountain. And I'm like, okay, what's better?

The picture, your one minute picture of the cabin by the mountain or actually being there and seeing the cabin by the mountain? Obviously being there. But we understand that the cabin by the mountain is still drawn there and it exists.

But the fullness of it is better. And I think that's as close of an analogy as we're going to get to how we live today and considering our years well, carrying over into the next life. That we take feeble actions here.

We try to help people. We try to serve others. We try to care for the poor. The orphans and the widows, as the Bible instructs. And we do what we can. And by the grace of God, he just enlightens that and enlarges that as we get to heaven.

And he sees, through Jesus, he sees our actions as much greater and interprets that out into its fullness, basically. And so even though we have many years to consider, past 80, I think that the time that we spent here is worth considering as we see in the psalm and gives us that wisdom to see what we do here really does carry on.

[ 13 : 57 ] into eternity. Thank you.