

# Lesson 12 | August 18, 2024

## Human Mortality and God's Eternality

**Study Text:** Psalm 90:1–17

**Central Truth:** Though people are mortal, they can have everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

**Key Verse: Psalm 90:2**

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (KJV).

Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- Students will examine the contrast in Scripture between fragile, temporary human life and God's eternal existence.
- Students will appreciate the importance of setting personal priorities according to godly values, which extend beyond this temporal world.
- Students will establish a regular practice of praising God for His gift of everlasting life.

### Introducing the Study

**Say:** Setting and maintaining good priorities can be one of life's biggest challenges. We know what we ought to pursue, and we can certainly discern what matters most. Yet the preoccupations and distractions of the moment catch our eyes—and snag our hearts—more often than we may like, or even admit.

### Opening Activity—Top Priority

*Ask.* *What are some of the highest priorities in your life? What are some things of low priority that might become a distraction from what is important?* Most Christians will identify their faith as top priority, as well as family, career, and friendships. Distractions can include the crises of the moment, as well as a desire for status, material things, and relationships.

**Say:** The things that deserve our highest priority can often be easy to recognize. These are the things that matter the most and for the longest time. Above all, for the Christian, these things transcend our temporary, mortal life and will matter in eternity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 90 is a reality check for followers of God. In its verses, we are reminded of our own mortality and the temporary nature of this life. The Psalmist also reminds us of the eternity of God: "Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God" (verse 2, NLT). Clearly, the things

that should matter to us are what matters to God. As you study these verses, think about your priorities. Ask God to help you “number your days” and maintain an eternal perspective.

## **Part 1—Our Everlasting God**

### **God without Beginning or End**

Psalm 90:1–2

**Say:** Psalm 90 explores the stark contrast between our eternal God and our own temporal and corruptible lives in this world. Verses 1–2 are a fitting opening to this discussion. As we study, we do well to recognize the big picture in this psalm. It describes God as everlasting and mighty as well as personal and involved in our lives every moment. This is the character of our loving God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

#### **Resource Packet Item 1: The Names of God**

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its content. Emphasize how God’s names teach us what He is like and how He relates to us.

It is important to note that Psalm 90 was written as a prayer by and from Moses. This great prophet and leader directed God’s people on what should have been a relatively short journey from Egypt to Canaan—perhaps a couple of months. But because of the unbelief of the people (see Numbers 13–14), it became a difficult, forty-year ordeal of wandering in the desert. Amid those difficult days and years, Moses called upon the Lord for help and encouragement. As he sought God, he recognized the need for a new perspective—a perspective that brought focus to the lives of the people and their understanding of God.

There are three sections to Psalm 90, with the first consisting of verses 1–2. In verse 1, Moses begins the prayer with the invocation, “Lord.” Here, “Lord” is the Hebrew word Adonai, which means “my Lord” or “my King.” Moses recognizes and declares that the true God is the real ruler and sovereign authority over the people. The Lord alone is worthy of their trust, and in the verses that follow, Moses expressed why this is.

Verse 1 sets the tone for the entire psalm: “Through all the generations you have been our home!” (NLT). The Israelites were in the midst of enduring a generation of wandering in the desert. It was a transient life. Yet they were not homeless. Despite the circumstances, God was dwelling with them. This points to the eternal existence of God. Certainly, the people were suffering for a generation. But they could find a permanent dwelling place in God.

Verse 2 reinforces that point. The expression, “before the mountains were born” (NLT), is a direct reference to creation. Then Moses used beautifully poetic terminology to describe God as the One who “gave birth to the earth and to the world” (NLT). What imagery could be more intimate and caring than that of a mother and a newborn child.

Moses' words pointed to a sense of relationship and established that God is the sole maker of the universe. He is without beginning and without end.

### ***Discuss***

? How is our understanding of God affected by the knowledge that He has no beginning and no end?

? In what ways is it meaningful and helpful to see God described as “giving birth” to all creation?

## **Not Subject to Time**

Psalm 90:3–4

**Say:** Many believers are familiar with James 4:14: “Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone” (NLT). These are wise words regarding the priorities of the believer. Psalm 90:3–4 is similar, yet far more blunt. In this sense, the psalm causes the believer to take a sober look at the reality of his or her life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 90:3 begins a section of the psalm that focuses on human mortality and divine wrath. This sobering passage begins by stating plainly that God is responsible for matters of life and death. God determines when the individual will return to dust, just as Scripture declares (see Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 3:20). Death is God’s prerogative, and human beings have no power or authority to change that reality.

Furthermore, God is timeless. “For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours” (Psalm 90:4, NLT). The declaration that a thousand years is to God like a brief passage of time is found in the New Testament as well, in 2 Peter 3:7–9. This reference includes a word of comfort concerning God’s promises, yet it also refers to judgment of sin. Thus, Psalm 90 and 2 Peter both remind us of the sovereignty of God over everything—including our life and our future.

Psalm 90 serves to remind God’s people that their situations, just like their lives, are temporary. But God is eternal, and He holds the events of human lives in His hands. This truth is a kind of “two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12, NLT). It is a word of encouragement, since God has made great promises to His people. Yet it is also a sober word of warning to walk with God and avoid the kind of rebellion that placed Israel in the desert for forty years. The verses that follow will explore the latter point. Yet Moses’ prayer will conclude with a word of hope and exhortation.

### ***Discuss***

? Why do you think people often fear their own mortality?

? How can the description of our mortality in Psalm 90 impact our view of God?

## **Part 2—Human Frailty and Sinfulness**

## **Sovereign over Life and Death**

Psalm 90:5–6,10

**Say:** Psalm 90:5–6, like other portions of the psalm, use quite intense and vivid terminology. This serves an important purpose, however, as it reminds us of God’s sovereignty over our lives. As we examine these verses, it is good to keep God’s authority as well as His mercy in view. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“You sweep people away like dreams that disappear” (Psalm 90:5, NLT). The terminology here is almost unsettling. Moses is describing life that exists for a moment and then is swept away by God. Scholars have noted that the comparison of sleep to human life is enlightening. Human beings are in a kind of “sleep” that dulls them to the reality of life’s fleeting existence. We don’t know how to number our days, and so we must be taught (verse 12). We fail to realize that life is like a withering blade of grass. We want to live as if tomorrow is guaranteed (see Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13–14).

Moses expressed this reality with a vivid illustration in Psalm 90:5–6: People are like grass that springs up in the morning. It blooms and flourishes, but by evening it is dry and withered. In the desert, small twigs of grass can begin to grow. But before long the intense heat will cause them to wither and ultimately die. It is the same with human life. We live day by day under the certain sentence that the end of life is inevitable. A person often lives to be seventy years old, or even eighty. Yet that life is brief and filled with hardship before the end of life comes (verse 10). Only God is in control of these matters. We are subject to Him and cannot alter His will by our own strength or resolve.

This was no doubt a very stirring prayer and message to a generation of people wandering the desert because of their own lack of trust in God. Yet it can speak to us today as well. Unless we are alive at the return of Christ, all of us are destined to die. It is sheer arrogance to live as if this is not reality. Thus, our proper response is to recognize God’s authority in all things and live under His lordship. Ultimately, this is what distinguishes the people of God from the unbelieving, wicked world. We are all destined to die. But as the verses that follow make clear, it is of greatest importance that we reject sin and live in trust of the Lord.

### ***Discuss***

? In what ways is it comforting to know that God is in total control over all matters of our mortality?

? How might these verses impact the way that you view life and death?

## **Aware of Our Sins**

Psalm 90:7–9,11

**Say:** Sin is an unpopular topic in our world and an uncomfortable topic within the church. Yet it has a direct impact upon how we view and respond to issues of life and

death. Psalm 90 approaches this topic in a very direct manner. And it is worthy of our examination. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

On multiple occasions, Israel's sin had provoked God's wrath as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land (see Exodus 32; Numbers 25). He knew their rebellion, unfaithfulness, murmuring, idolatry, and unbelief. They may have become unaware of sin, apathetic toward it, or felt that they had kept it secret. But all sin is fully exposed under the bright light of God's presence.

The overarching point of Psalm 90:7–9 is this: Life under the wrath of God is a bleak and difficult life filled with trouble. Wrongs are exposed, resulting in guilt and regret plaguing one's conscience. This transient, temporary existence is soon exposed for its toil and emptiness. The mortal life, lived under God's wrath, is not a good life.

Verse 11 then echoes earlier verses in contrasting human weakness and fallenness with the sovereignty of God. For the wicked, that sovereignty is seen in His anger, reaching a level that mere mortals cannot comprehend. The second half of verse 11 is challenging to scholars: "Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve" (NLT). It might be best understood as a question: "Who can understand God's wrath fully enough to fear and reverence Him to the degree that He deserves?" The answer is, "No one." This is a sobering thought, since people have felt God's wrath throughout history. Yet this is only a small portion of His full wrath. As a result, we cannot revere Him to the extent that He deserves.

This passage reminds us that God's Word can be difficult and sobering. Sometimes it drives us to our knees in tearful prayer rather than to our feet in exuberant worship. Yet for the believer, the hard passages do not stand alone. Although Exodus 32 described God's wrath, not long thereafter God reminded Moses of His grace at the second giving of the covenant after the golden calf incident: "The Lord passed in front of Moses, calling out, 'Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness'" (Exodus 34:6, NLT). We are weak and vulnerable in our mortality. But our eternal God seeks to bestow love, mercy, and blessing upon us. And He is patient with us. His anger against our sin is not forever when we cry out to Him. As we move into the closing verses of Psalm 90, we see that Moses turned his focus from wrath to blessing as he sought a restoration of the people to the presence of God.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Death and the Christian**

Distribute the worksheet and complete it individually or as a class. Then discuss the questions together. Note the contrast between the sober reality of death that accompanies our mortality and the great promises that we enjoy because we serve an eternal God.

#### ***Discuss***

? What is the right way for Christians to react when they realize that they have sinned? What is the wrong way? Why?

? What is the right way for Christians to react when they see sin in the lives of others? What is the wrong way? Why?

## **Part 3—God Rewards Kingdom Work He Teaches Us to Live Wisely**

Psalm 90:12–15

**Say:** The Christian life must be marked by learning from God. As we ponder our own mortality and vulnerabilities, this becomes more and more obvious. Our understanding of life and faith is limited. But as Moses expressed in his prayer, we can turn to God for direction, wisdom, and strength. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 90:12 is Moses' prayerful response to the sobering description of God's wrath and our brevity of life. In a fallen world, the brevity of life is often shrugged off with calls to "make the most of it and enjoy ourselves while we are here." But Moses reminds us that we have something to learn from the brevity of life. These lessons, given by God, will make us wise and teach us to walk wisely. At the root of these lessons is a realization that we must value each one of our days, using each one according to the priorities of God, not our own desires.

This change of priority is borne out in the prayers of verses 13–15. Verse 13 is a humble request for mercy: "O Lord, come back to us! How long will you delay? Take pity on your servants!" (NLT). Those who pray this repentant prayer recognize that their own sinful acts have led to their distance from God, and they need His pity—His loving mercy—to find restoration into God's presence once again.

Verse 14 carries the desires of verse 13 forward into a proper human response to God. The people of Israel had been unsatisfied with God. Despite His merciful acts in delivering them from Egypt and setting the Promised Land before their eyes, they were prone to desire returning to that place of bondage (see Number 14:3) or adopting the false gods of Egypt as their own (see Exodus 32:1). What a contrast from the humble prayer of Psalm 90:14, that specifically sought to find satisfaction in God's "mercy" (KJV) or "unfailing love" (NLT) and desired to "sing for joy to the end of our lives" (NLT). This is the essence of repentance, for it not only admits sin and turns to God, but also seeks restored intimacy and fellowship with God. The previous verses of Psalm 90 make it clear that God's wrath is a fearsome thing. But Moses' prayer went beyond a request to avoid wrath. True repentance will, by definition, lead one to seek God's presence, and true restoration will make that a reality.

Psalm 90:15 is a prayer for full reversal from the status of the past. The people had suffered great misery as a result of their sinfulness and failure to appreciate their own mortality. But now Moses cried out for gladness and joy that would lift them up to heights comparable to the depths they had suffered. Similarly, he prayed that the wasted years of the past would give way to good years of joy in God's presence in the future.



### **Resource Packet Item 3: Famous Last Words**

Distribute the worksheet, and review the last recorded words of certain biblical figures. Then discuss the questions together.

#### ***Discuss***

- ? What lessons can you learn by considering the brevity of your own life?
- ? In what ways is the Christian life a reversal of the sinful life?

## **May We See God Work Again!**

Psalm 90:16–17

**Say:** While we often recall the miraculous stories of the Old Testament, the history of the Church is also filled with examples of God doing great things. God has always been at work among His people, and He can do great things today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The conclusion of Moses' prayer in Psalm 90:16–17 is fitting for God's people throughout time. The Israelites no longer saw God's great works—in part because they were no longer looking. God had delivered them and was leading them. Now they needed to see and appreciate His glory, power, and goodness.

The prayer concludes with a desire to know they were back in good relationship with God. The future would be difficult as they traveled the desert and eventually entered Canaan. They needed God's help and presence to succeed. They were only mortal, but success and blessing would come if the eternal God was on their side.

#### ***Discuss***

- ? How have you seen God's work in your life?
- ? What do you think it means to be approved of God?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Psalm 90 records Moses' prayer for the transformation of a people—from being lost and facing wrath to seeking God's presence. We all need such a transformation. Yet it is not momentary. As we live this mortal life, we must seek God daily, longing for His eternal presence.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Find a way to become involved in evangelism, whether in your own community or through missions. Pray that many will find their way into the presence of the eternal God.
- Pray with someone dealing with the painful reality of life in a mortal, temporary world—especially the loss associated with death and sickness. Ask God to bring comfort and hope to those suffering.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

The Eternal "I Am."  
Exodus 3:13–15

Tuesday:

The Brevity of Life.  
Job 7:6–9

Wednesday:

The Weariness of Life.  
Ecclesiastes 4:1–3

Thursday:

Jesus Declares His Eternality.  
John 8:51–58

Friday:

Christ's Obedience and Exaltation.  
Philippians 2:5–9

Saturday:

Godly Perspective of Life.  
James 4:13–15