

The length of our days

Please read Psalm 90 and Luke 2:21-40 and then pray: *Eternal God, as we step forward in faith into this new year, may we be blessed with increasing wisdom as we seek to live with the knowledge of your blessing, grace, and favour; in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.*

Psalms is quite simply a very beautiful book in the OT which is hugely precious to both Jews and Christians. It provides us with a fantastic resource for the worship of Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. It is an amazing book (5 books in 1) of songs and prayers which strengthen hope, confidence, faith, and love for God. We have just recently crossed the threshold of a new year. 2026 is now upon us. If you were to choose a Psalm for the “turning of the year,” you could do no better than choose Psalm 90 because no other Psalm gives us a more challenging or realistic view of *the length of our days and the length of our years*. One of the wisest prayers in the entire book of Psalms emerges in the middle of Psalm 90. Use this prayer as part of your regular prayer offering; here it is;

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)

The Psalmist brings forward that request after seriously considering two outstanding biblical truths which stand in stark contrast to each other.

- The eternity and eternal nature of God.
- The mortality of man and the brevity of human life.

We will come to those truths in a moment, but let me share a few thoughts about Psalm 90 which I hope will give you a better perspective of these words and why they were written for God’s people. Before the opening words of the Psalm, we are informed that they were written **by Moses**. Even in our times of biblical ignorance, many people, young and old, have some knowledge of Moses and his story, especially the story of the exodus. The exodus was the founding event of the nation of Israel, and Moses was the personality at the centre of it all. But as well as being informed that the Psalm was composed by Moses, we are also given a description of the man himself. He is referred to as “the man of God.”

We may well ask - Are there not many “men of God” written about in the pages of the OT? Yes – of course. But if you had to pick out just **one man** from the OT whose faith in God shone the brightest, you would probably choose Moses. Therefore, the psalm we have before us, one which is great to consider at the beginning of any new year, was composed by the greatest man of God in the OT. (Deuteronomy 34: 10-12)

It is a Psalm that is placed deliberately at the beginning of book 4 of the Psalms. Book 4 stretches from Psalm 90 to Psalm 106. It is interesting to note that all the references to Moses in the book of Psalms come within this book 4, except one. (Psalm 77:20) Psalms 105 and 106 focus heavily on the life and activities of Moses. Psalm 90 must have been composed during the “wilderness years.” Moses’ life can be split into three. His forty years as Egyptian Prince. His forty years as a shepherd in Midian after fleeing from Egypt. Then finally, his forty years as leader of Israel, most of which were spent wandering in the wilderness with his people, the people God had called to be “His very own people.”

The bitter and harsh reality of those years in the barren wilderness with the Israelites awareness of sin and failure, death, and the wrath of God can be felt in this Psalm. (7-10) Moses never made it into the promised land, but he was allowed to see it from the heights of Mount Nebo before his own death at the age of 120. (Deuteronomy 34: 1-8). What we have in Psalm 90 is the great reflections of an outstanding man of God who experienced a very varied, challenging, and full life, but more importantly

that that, **a man who knew God “face to face.”** Psalm 90 contains the words of a very wise man of courageous faith, spiritual anointing, strength, and calibre. (Deuteronomy 34:10)

Moses highlights two things in this Psalm of reflection and challenge. Like all Psalmists, he begins **with God** – the God who created all things. Moses is often associated with great mountains and his Psalm speaks eloquently about the fact that “before the *mountains* were born, **you** (God) brought forth the earth and the world.” God is the creator of all things, including man who is made in God’s image. But Moses also wants to highlight and stress another essential truth about the God he serves. He writes about the God who is “from everlasting to everlasting.” Moses worshipped the everlasting God – the very great, eternal, immortal, invisible God. (1 Timothy 6: 15-16)

Moses first encountered God and God’s voice through a mysterious, miraculous burning bush. During this holy and awesome encounter, Moses is told that God’s name is “I AM.” I AM the One who has been and will always exist and reign. This is the eternal God who will be with Moses as he confronts the power of Pharaoh. Moses does not need to fear anything.

The bible (OT and NT) emphasises what the apostle Paul refers to as “God’s invisible qualities, **his eternal power and divine nature.**” (Romans 1:20) God’s glorious eternal nature and awesome power stand out like a mighty mountain. This is the God who “was and is and ever shall be.” Psalm 90 shares much in common with the great Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah poses this question. *Do you not know? Have you not heard? **The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no-one can fathom. (Isaiah 40:28)*** So Moses begins this praising and petitioning Psalm with an exclamation about God’s eternal infinite power and nature. We too can pray and proclaim with him, this “man of God” – “**From everlasting to everlasting – You are my God.**” As theologian W. S Plumer wrote: “There is no higher mystery than God’s eternity.”

But then this eternal nature and glory of God is compared to the demise and mortal nature of man. Man does not and cannot live forever in this world which now experiences God’s wrath. Our life is short, pathetically short when contrasted with God’s eternity. Our lifespan consists of a miniscule of world history. We return to dust quickly. Here speaks the man who lived for 120 years, but witnessed many of his fellow countrymen living nowhere near that long – 70 to 80 years at the most. Many died in their youth. Whereas a thousand years are like one day in God’s sight, a millennium to humankind is a massive sweep of history. The stark truth is that as individuals, who are made in the image of the eternal God, “we last no longer than a dream” (GNB), “life is soon over and we are gone.” We are in fact like the grass that Moses would observe in the wilderness which sprung up with the dew of the morning, but by evening, the same grass had withered and been blown down and swept away. Our older hymns capture this contrast between God and man.

*Frail as summer’s flower we flourish, blows the wind and it is gone,
But while mortals rise and perish God endures unchanging on. (H.F. Lyte)*

At the end of any year, I am always interested to note two things. Who has made the new year’s honours list, and who passed away in the year now coming to an end. The media always like to focus on both. As you look at the long list of the “A-listers” who have died in 2025, it is interesting to see how many did not make it to 70 or 80. They were famous for different reasons. Bridget Badot, impressive French singer, and actress died aged 91. But Diego Jota the Liverpool football star died aged 28. You have actors dying like Robert Redford, Gene Hackman, Val Kilmer – men who so often appeared invincible on screen have now left the stage altogether. It was William Shakespeare who wrote the famous – “*Out, out, brief candle. Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*”

Is it any wonder then, in the light of God's glory and eternity, and the light of man's very brief appearance on the stage of history, that Moses, the man of God invites and encourages us to understand and pray in this way;

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (NIV) Teach us how short our time is, so then we can be wise. (GNB)

How do we face this short and uncertain life with wisdom and courage and **hope**? If life in this broken and fallen world is so brief, uncertain, dangerous, and unpredictable - what is the wisest way to move forward? The first thing to do of course is to face reality, and not run away from the fact that death is near to us all. Men and women do not like to face this fact regarding their certain death, and they certainly do not want to consider what Moses and the bible make clear – that all our deaths are connected to personal sin and the wrath of God. "The wages of sin are death" (Romans 6:23) wrote the apostle Paul; he also wrote that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) - **But there is hope**, real hope, even **eternal joyful hope** and this is what we consider now with Moses. What is the way of hope and joy according to this Psalm?

The first positive point in this – and this is precisely where Moses begins his Psalm. Do we know God as our "dwelling place" as "our home?" Do we consciously live under the shadow of His wing? Do we have personal knowledge as Moses did, that God is our personal Refuge, Shelter, and Hiding Place? Do we live under God's protective care and sheltering love? *'Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.'* That is the testimony of all true believers, not just the testimony of Moses and those who followed in his footsteps.

The Christian faith centres on broken human beings returning to God in true repentance and with faith in his saving love which we know to be available through the gift of God's Son – Jesus. Have we returned home to God? Have we, like the prodigal son in the NT (Luke 15:11 f) made a strong conscious decision to return to our Heavenly Father, our Creator, our Saviour God? This is where real hope begins – in being reconciled to God and personally coming into the knowledge that God is now our Refuge and our Home. We live under the shadow of the Almighty. Under His care, there is peace, security, light, eternal love and saving care! Are we positioned under God's banner? In our NT reading, we hear how the elderly prophetess Anna made a conscious decision to reside in the vicinity of the Temple as she waited for the advent of Messiah. She never left the Temple, but devoted herself to fasting and prayer. God calls us not to reside in a Temple, or in Temple courts or courtyards, but bids us to come and shelter in His presence. What begins on earth can then continue for all eternity.

The family film that seems to be screened every Christmas *'The Wizard of Oz'* not only introduced us to "somewhere over the rainbow" – but also made us realise that 'There is no place like home.' What if we were always meant to have "God as our home?" God as our earthly and heavenly dwelling place. God bringing us that beautiful sense of comfort, belonging, acceptance, security, warmth, and family that we associate with 'home'? Is it time to focus on what "home" should ultimately mean for us as God's people? Is it time to glory in God as our real and ultimate Refuge?

The second positive highlighted by Moses is this: as well as people being able to know the sheltering presence of God in this life and in this world, we can also know the blessing of God's **steadfast covenantal love**. God promises his faithful love to all who would live under the shadow of his wing. Moses prayed: *'Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.'* Can our daily experience be one that is blessed through our knowledge of God's unfailing love through Jesus Christ and the presence of His Spirit? Yes – it can. Each morning, each day can be faced with the precious and uplifting message that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his

mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning! Great is your faithfulness, O Lord. (Lamentations 3: 22-23)

Moses, our father in the faith, knew he could rise every morning and face every day (whatever uncertainty lay ahead) and walk out in the knowledge of His God's unfailing love. God had covenanted himself to Moses – and Moses had covenanted himself to God. This is exactly what the Christian does through Jesus Christ. We enter that covenantal relationship of trust and love through which God has vowed to never leave us or forsake us. God has promised through Jesus to be with us forever. And Jesus who we know as our Saviour and Lord is the only One who has truly **defeated death** – this death, this final enemy that all humankind must face which is spoken of so plainly in this Psalm. Jesus has overcome death and promises his followers will also triumph over death and know eternal life. This is the good news of His gospel - and it is free – it is all grace;

'This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, **who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**' (2 Timothy 1: 9-10)

The death that we know awaits us in the future, and may only be a few months or years away, has, in Christ been destroyed! Jesus alone is the Resurrection and the life. Before raising Lazarus from death, Jesus exclaimed and explained – '**I AM** the Resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, **even though he dies**, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11: 25-26) Yes – Jesus is the "I AM" Moses met at that burning bush. The God of the living!

If we know and love Jesus, if we are covenanted to Him, we have eternal life; not because we have earned it, but because he died for us, in our place, so that our sin (which leads to death) can be forgiven, God's wrath against all evil can be appeased, and eternal life can be experienced. Yes, seventy to eighty to ninety years here if we manage it, but then onto eternity because Jesus is Eternal Life, (1 John 1: 2) and we have lived under the shadow of God's wing during our turbulent earthly pilgrimage.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Are you 'in Christ Jesus and in his love?' If you are – then as the Psalmist declares – you can travel through the valley of the shadow of death and yet *fear no evil*. (Psalm 23:4) We can believe with the words of Psalm 23: '*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*' (23:6) It is possible for us to pray those words of assurance and faith uttered by the aged Simeon just before he died; *Now Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace for I know your gracious salvation has arrived with Jesus.*

Finally, and I will finish with this. We can live life with God Almighty as our Home, our Shelter. We can daily know and appreciate the steadfast covenantal love of God through Jesus our Saviour who has forgiven us and opened the way to everlasting life by his glorious resurrection from the dead. We can also know the precious **favour and grace** of our God assisting us and equipping us to live and serve him in this world – however tough and uncertain this world is. Moses final petition here, must be ours. It must be ours at the beginning of 2026. It must be ours at the beginning of every day God gives us life and breath. Here it is:

'May the favour (the beauty) of the Lord our God rest upon us, establish (prosper) the work of our hands for us – yes, establish (prosper) the work of our hands.'

Moses knew that the grace and favour of God was with him in this world, in that wilderness! God's favour rested upon Moses – and so Moses was able to do great exploits for God and for God's glory. We too must daily pray for God's favour and blessing upon the work of our hands, our Christian service

and witness, and the work and ministry of this Church. Can we pray for God to establish and prosper and richly bless our endeavours in 2026? We must daily seek God's favour.

Throughout advent and Christmas, the message of **God's favour** has been magnified. Elizabeth knew 'God's favour' and became pregnant even though she had been declared to be barren and was beyond child-bearing years. (Luke 1:25) Mary was declared by the angel Gabriel, God's special envoy, to be 'highly favoured.' She had found God's favour. (Luke 1:28, 30) The shepherds on the Bethlehem hills heard about God's favour through the song of the angel choir. *'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.'* And then the reference to Jesus himself in our reading today. *'And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the **grace of God was upon him.**'* (Luke 2:40)

It is possible to know the favour of God here on earth! The angels told us so! It is possible to know and enjoy the favour of God resting upon us; the peace of God, the shalom of our Heavenly Father and Keeper. (Psalm 121) May we seek this gracious favour and blessing throughout our lives and in all aspects of our service for God. 'May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us' must be our prayer, and we could then see God beautifying and establishing all the work of our feeble and frail hands. That grace and favour is sufficient for all things, for all challenges, for all set-backs, for all miracles. Moses knew this to be the case – the man who had seen a sea parted before his eyes as he held out the staff of God, and who led his people to walk safely through on dry ground.

Perhaps as Moses prayed this prayer for God's favour at the climax to his Psalm, he had his brother Aaron's great prayer of blessing in mind. You remember that ancient prayer of blessing and favour? Let this be our watchword and inspiration for 2026 and all our remaining days upon this earth:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. (Numbers 6: 24-26)

Amen.

(Revd Peter J Clarkson 4.1.26)

