



## The Psalms – Redeeming the Brief and the Broken

Josh Patterson – July 21, 2019

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Good afternoon! How are we doing? Good? My name is Josh Patterson. I'm one of the pastors here on staff and have the opportunity to be with you today, and I am excited about it. We're going to be in Psalms, chapter 90. If you have a Bible, turn there with me. If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the back of the seat in front of you. We're going to spend all of our time in Psalm 90 today.

Earlier this year, my oldest daughter, Lily, turned 13. It was one of those birthdays that Natalie and I decided we wanted to highlight and mark as a milestone birthday. We felt like it was a significant year, for obvious reasons, so one of the things we did was that her birthday extended to this birthday week, and part of that week was a night of blessing and a night of prayer for her.

We asked all of our family, who, thankfully, all live here in the Metroplex to come and be a part of that. We had aunts and uncles and grandparents who were there. We invited close friends to be there. We took the night as an opportunity to speak life into Lily and to speak words of life and words of blessing and to call out what we see in her and to offer her our hopes and our prayers and what we really think she can be and who she already is, trying to remind her who she is and whose she is.

It was actually a really powerful night. It was a significant night, and I'm extremely thankful for it. Part of that night was a video. The video was about 15 minutes long, and it was one of those videos that started with Natalie being pregnant. Then, it went really all through Lily's 13 years. You can imagine it was emotional. I was a mess probably 30 seconds into the video. I was exhausted by the end of the video, but I was a wreck about 30 seconds in.

It's in times like that when you have the opportunity to reflect. You look back, and you see, and you really realize how quickly this whole thing called *life* is really happening. The older I get the more I believe people when they say to me, "The years go by fast." As a new parent, you hear, "This is going

to go by quickly," and you kind of think you believe them. Then, you start to experience the rapid pace of life, and it's not just the pace out there, but it's the years go by so quickly.

In families when you're raising up a crew, you've heard the phrase, "The days seem long, but the years are short." The older I get the more I begin to appreciate phrases like that, because they're not just phrases; they become my experience. In those moments... In fact, we just had another one this past week when Evan Bleecker, who turns 13 in the next couple of days... We had another one of those nights, a night when we prayed for Evan and blessed Evan and spoke life into Evan. Friends and family were there, and a video was played.

For me, these types of events cause me to reflect. I kind of move back into a place of introspection where I'm asking some of those questions that can be both level setting and a little bit haunting at the same time, if you know what I mean. The questions I would ask myself are something like...*Am I doing a good job here? Am I raising her well?*

In all of my hopes and all of my dreams and all of my wants for her and for me as a husband and for my other children and in my role as a leader and as a pastor, am I doing this well? Because I can feel it slipping through my hands. I can see the window of life closing. I don't know when it shuts. I just know it is closing. I can feel the years. They just kind of evaporate. They just go, and they stack up and stack up and stack up. Then, you look back and think, "How did I get here?" And it happened quickly.

I assume you have had moments like that or seasons like that, seasons of reflection and moments that cause you to ask some of life's deeper questions, and those moments can come through things that are really great through celebration, like we had with my daughter, or they can come through seasons of suffering or everything in between, but those questions that begin to gnaw at us and haunt us a little bit are questions that are either level setting or direction setting, and that's where Psalm 90 is going to go.

Psalm 90 is going to press us and begin to give us a picture of what life looks like, but I want you to think, as we're turning before we jump into the text, about those times of introspection for you. Maybe you're not in one of those seasons, and that's fine, but maybe this morning provides an opportunity just to check in and just to kind of get the pulse of where you may find yourself on a day like this. How am I doing? Am I investing my life or am I spending my life?

You see, they're different. If I'm spending my life, I'm spending it until either my days or my money run out, but if I'm investing my life, I'm putting deposits into something for a future return which is different. It's just different. Let me give you a couple of things to be mindful of as we read through Psalms, chapter 90, together. We're not going to be able to unpack all of these points, but I think they are significant. If you choose to reflect on Psalm 90, here are some things to consider.

Psalm 90 is written by Moses, which makes it the oldest psalm in all of Scripture. Here we have a psalm of Moses written by a man who has weathered storms and seen both victories and defeats. This is likely written at the end of Moses' life, which means he has wandered through the wilderness. He has seen death and destruction through the Red Sea. He has seen life. As a man in old age looks back and pens a psalm like this, keep that in mind.

The second thing I want you to keep in mind is that verse 1 and verse 17, the last verse, work together in complement. Specifically, in verse 1, you're going to hear that God is our dwelling place or our refuge. That will become the basis of the prayer Moses asks and offers in verse 17, so the fact that God is our dwelling place becomes the basis of Moses saying to God, "Will you extend your favor to me? Will you extend your favor to me?"

You need to know that Psalm 90 is a reflection on three things. First, a reflection on the transient or the brevity of life. Psalm 90 is going to show us that life is brief. It's just brief. It goes by quickly. It's going to use metaphors and similes and all types of poetry to get at this reality, that we're here today and gone tomorrow. In Psalm 90, life is brief and transient.

The second thing Psalm 90 is a reflection on is the nature of life under the wrath of God. That's heavy! The nature of life under the wrath of God is weighty, that is heavy, and that is true. Moses is going to spend some time in verses 6 through 11, and it's going to feel thick. Finally, it's a reflection on the favor of God.

I want you to see the cause-and-effect reality that's happening here in Psalm 90. You'll feel this. It wounds to heal. It disrupts to protect. It shouts to awaken. There is a purpose behind this psalm, and it is to open our eyes, to get our attention, to refocus our efforts, to get us on the straight and narrow path, and to course correct a life by saying, "Wake up! You don't have a ton of time, and how you live and how you invest and how you spend your days actually matters. Wake up to this reality."

The cadence or the rhythm of the psalm is, "God is big. Life is brief. We are broken. Wisdom is essential. God is gracious." Amen? Let me read that again. God is big in verses 1 and 2. Life is brief in verses 3 through 6. We are broken in verses 7 through 11. Wisdom is essential in verse 12. God is gracious in verses 13 through 17.

The question I hope to answer in our time together is...*How are our brief and broken lives redeemed?* I'm just going to give you the answer to that question now. It's this. Here's my point. Our brief and broken lives are redeemed through wisdom and grace. Let's jump into Psalm 90. It reads like this: **"A Prayer of Moses, the man of God."** Verse 1:

**"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever 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 seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; 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!"**

Life is brief and broken, and we see this right out of the gate. Moses starts in verse 1 and describes the Lord our God. The word he uses here for Lord is *Adonai*, which means Master or Sovereign or

Ruler. What Moses is doing is establishing God as the authoritative ruler over all things. You're going to begin to see a contrast that begins to be set up right here out of the gate.

Moses is saying, "God is in charge. He reigns and rules over all things, but thankfully, this God who is in charge, this God who is our master is our dwelling place." The imagery of dwelling place or other times translated *refuge* is this idea that he is our safe shelter, that we might run to him, so what we should be taking away from verse 1 is that God is safe, established, stable, and welcomes us in, but he's also different than us. He's also in charge of all things, rules all things, and oversees all things, so the picture, if we could have one, for verses 1 and 2 is that...

1. *God is our sovereign shelter.* We need to get a firm grasp on verse 1, as we work our way through the rest of the psalm, because the waters get choppy, so to speak. I also want you to note, in verses 1 and 2, that God is seen as the answer or the antidote or the solution to our brevity and brokenness and not just the contrast to it. Let me say that again. Moses is not just setting up a contrast between you and me and God; he is saying that God is the answer to our contrast. Where we are weak, he is strong not just in contrast but as our solution and as our hope.

As we work our way through this psalm, you will feel the waters getting choppy, and if I could just mix the metaphor, certainly you've been on a flight where the captain has come over the PA system and he or she has said, "I've turned on the seatbelt sign, and I need you to just stay put, so don't move about in the cabin. We may experience some turbulence up ahead." Well, that's where we're headed, so buckle up.

Verses 3 through 11 are just hard. They're just hard verses, except they're not hard without a point. They wound to heal, as we've already talked about. Look at verse 3. He starts off by saying, "**You return man to dust...**" In contrast to this everlasting God who Moses has already highlighted in verses 1 and 2, we see humanity is weak and frail. "**You return man to dust...**"

Pick up the metaphors and the similes here. Dust, withering grass, floods, dreams, morning, and evening... What Moses is trying to capture is the transience and the brevity of your life and my life. He's going to say, "It's like dust which comes up and then goes back down. It's gone. You will actually return to the ground from whence you came," or "You're like a piece of grass who shoots up in the morning strong and vibrant and full of vitality and life, and by the midday the sun begins to beat down and scorch, and by the evening, it's gone."

Maybe you're like a dream. You've had that experience where you wake up in the morning, and you realize, "Gosh! I was dreaming, but it's over, and I can't hardly remember or recall it." Moses is saying, "This is what life is like. It's just here and then it's not." He said that this reality washes over us like a flood. It comes in uninvited and, perhaps, unannounced. When it comes, it can at times cause damage. The imagery here is graphic as he's showing, "Like a flood it comes in, and this change that it brings about is one where the vitality is taken away."

My dad is in his mid-70s. The imagery he is now using with the family, which I don't find helpful, is he's saying, "Son, I'm over the drop zone, and I just don't know when the hatch is going to open." I'm like, "Well, that's discouraging, Dad, and the children are here so can you find another way to describe this?"

The reality is we're all over the drop zone. We just don't know. We just don't know when the hatch is going to open. You don't know when your number is going to get called. What Moses is saying here is, "Yes! That's true. That's what your life is like. That's what my life is like. It's like dust. It's like grass. It's like a flood. It's like a dream here today and gone tomorrow."

Do you feel the weight of this? Do you feel the sorrow in that? Do you feel the sting in it? The question I would give to you to consider and to begin to wrestle with is...*What do you do in light of this?* How do you handle these truths? As you think about life being brief and, perhaps, if the Lord would give us 70 or 80 years, I'm halfway there. Some of you aren't quite that far along, and others are beyond it.

What do you do with it? Do you avoid it? Do you pretend it isn't so? Do you make light of it? Here it's not funny. The way Moses is portraying this here is actually sad. This is a part of the fall. It isn't supposed to be like this is what Moses is highlighting. Life is brief, and that is sad news. It's here today, and it's gone tomorrow.

One of the privileges I have as a pastor is being with people during significant moments. Sometimes those significant moments can be moments of celebration. I've been in the waiting room when a new child has been brought forward. I've been in seasons where we have celebrated new life and miracles God has granted, and those seasons are amazing!

Those events and opportunities are profound. I've been at weddings where I've seen a husband and a wife (a mom and a dad) who have prayed for their little girl who is no longer a little girl who is

walking down an aisle. It's this coming together and the forming of a new family, and there is rejoicing, and I've been there. I've officiated dozens and dozens of those.

Those are significant moments, but I've also been at funerals, and I've officiated them. I've done the newborn and the elderly and everything in between. If you have eyes to see, you really can't walk away from those moments without it tilling up something in you and without it causing you to deal with some of the emotions and the realities, whether good or bad or challenging and painful.

The question I'm putting on you is...*What do you do with that?* How do you handle that? Moses is going to talk later in verse 12, that there is something to steward with this reality, and that the wise man and the wise woman do not turn their backs from it but actually face into it and embrace it. That embracing will actually lead them to redeem it.

If I could give you something as it relates to verses 3 through 6, it would be don't move too quickly past it. It may be good for you to sit in the fact that your life is brief just like mine, and if the Lord would give you 95 years, the Scriptures would still say that is not how it was intended to be. It's just brief.

The sad reality is that it just gets worse from here. It's not just that you have a short life, but it's that you have a short life and it's under the curse. You have a short life and it's a life under wrath, according to verses 7 through 11. I feel like I come bearing bad news, but I'm hoping that the bad news actually makes the good news which is coming even sweeter, that you would taste the bitterness of what is so when you get the sweetness of grace, it's that much more sweet.

In verse 7, you see that Moses is going to say, "**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.**" It's heavy. It's heavy, and there really isn't any way to wiggle out of it. It just is what it is.

If the picture in the first one is of a sovereign shelter, the picture in the second piece of life being short is this ever-fading and ever-renewing reality that life just moves on. The picture here is me as a guilty sinner before a righteous judge. I just stand condemned and can't get out from under it. I can't project an image of being right or good in such a way that I get out from under the reality that I know and you know and we know about one another and everybody else, that we're all broken.

We know something is off, and the Scriptures are saying that something which is off is the reality of sin in your life and in my life which has created a fracture in the world. That fracture has left a chasm between the God who created us who is holy and righteous and the people who rebelled against him. In that gap stands judgment and wrath.

Shoot! I mean, I would rather be talking about something else, candidly. This subject in and of itself doesn't necessarily translate to a happy afternoon. Yet, the Scriptures are shaking us to awaken us. Moses is disrupting you to protect you. Think of how unloving it would be to go all through your brief life to find out only at the end that you are under judgment and you didn't even know.

There is coming a day when we will face into our Creator, and we will meet him, and we will give an account. Moses is saying, "Wake up! That day is coming! Because your life is brief, that day will be here before you know it." He's trying to course correct us. He's trying to rattle us to get our attention. It's actually a very loving and gracious thing he's doing here.

We find ourselves with our public selves and our private selves when we want to hide. There is nowhere to go. You can't pretend. We can't act. We just stand guilty. Do you know where that leaves Moses? That leaves Moses at the end of his life in this posture. We see that posture in verse 12, where he says, "So would you teach me? Would you help me? Because I'm in a situation that I can't get out from under, and I'm going to need you to intervene, and I'm willing to hear and to listen and to do what you ask me to do."

Here's what's crazy about you and me. You and I know more about this solution than Moses ever did, so the fact that you and I were under judgment and God has sent his Son, and in the sending of Christ, Christ comes forward, and in my place condemned he stood so that he bears God's wrath, and he takes the judgment, and he absorbs my sin and punishment and death.

God has made a way, so you and I actually know more than Moses knew. How profound is that? Notice the posture of Moses. My question is...*Is this our posture?* "Would you teach me? Would you instruct me?" I feel like the older I get the more confident I am in what I do not know. The older I get the more confident I am in what I don't know.

Here, Moses is later in life saying, "I am still in a place, Sovereign King, where I have to be taught by you. Forget that I've led millions. I've seen the miracles. I've charged the armies. I've done all of

these things. I still need you to teach me and lead me and guide me. Why? Because I need a heart of wisdom.

Would you teach me to number my days that I would spend them and invest them well? Would you teach me to number my days that I would navigate life wisely? Would you teach me to number my days so that I wouldn't waste them on trivial, worldly, fruitless pursuits but I would invest in that which lasts? Would you teach me to number my days?" Here's the thing about wisdom. I want to give you three quick things on it.

First, *you don't get it unless you have the fear of the Lord*. According to the Scriptures, wisdom comes through the fear of the Lord. You don't have to go far in the book of Proverbs to see this. Chapter 1, verse 7, says, "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of [wisdom]...**" If you do not fear the Lord, you do not have wisdom.

You may have age. You may have maturity. You may have business savvy and street smarts, but you do not have wisdom. If you want wisdom, wisdom comes only through the fear of the Lord. Look in verse 11, where Moses asks this question: "**Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?**" Who considers this? The answer is, "The wise man and the wise woman consider this." Who thinks this way? Who asks this question?

The wise person asks this question, because they're posturing their life under this understanding. "God, I was in such a bind," and that's an understatement. I think about Ephesians, chapter 1, and Ephesians, chapter 2, where the Scriptures lay it out that I was a child of wrath, but God in his mercy has made a way through Christ. Who considers this? The wise person does. Who rejoices in this? The wise person does. The thing about wisdom is you only get it through the fear of the Lord.

Secondly, *wisdom is radically relational*. It is radically relational. You get it through the fear of the Lord, and you grow in it as you come toward him. You lose it as you move away from him. Wisdom is radically relational. You grow in it as you move toward him, and you lose it as you move away from him. If I could give you a definition (my third point on wisdom)...

Thirdly, *wisdom is defined as skill in the art of godly living*. What I want you to note about that is wisdom is a skill. It's not something that you just get and have. You don't just get wisdom, and therefore, finally, have wisdom. Wisdom is something you gain over time. It's like a muscle, and as

you exercise it, it grows and stretches and flexes and moves. If you don't exercise it, it atrophies and weakens. Skill in the art of godly living...

Why the art? Because it's a savvy-ness you're learning. It's not a static thing. It's a dynamic thing. You're growing in wisdom. How do I navigate life? How do I navigate people? How do I navigate suffering and challenges? In all of these things, you and I are learning on the fly, so you're constantly running life by the Spirit through the rubric of the gospel asking yourself questions. "God, where would you lead me? How would you have me go? How would you have me love this person? How would you have me respond?"

The more we're interacting in those realities the more this muscle called *wisdom* is developed. Now, there's a spiritual gift called *wisdom*. That's not what he's talking about here. He's talking about the reality of wisdom which is available to all who fear the Lord (skill in the art of godly living). What I want you to see is how the tables turn.

Verses 3 through 11 are tough and are heavy and are weighty, but look with me in verse 13, where he says, **"Return, O Lord! How long?"** If you look back in verse 3, you'll see it here. **"You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"** Then, again in verse 13, **"Return, O Lord!"** What I love about this interplay is that in verse 3, humanity is being returned back to dust, but here in verse 13, we see God is returning back to humanity in compassion and mercy.

He's coming back to his people. Notice what happens. Where all of the imagery has been transient and fast and moving with dreams and floods and dust, it talks about and builds up this instability and the transience of your life and my life, but here in the end, in verses 13 through 17, let me just hit the highlights.

**"Have pity [compassion] 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... Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power...establish the work of our hands..."**

We have moved from that which is unstable to that which is stable, from that which is not established to that which is established. You move from being grass which is withered and gone by the evening to being renewed by his steadfast love day in and day out. What a change! What a

gracious turn! What a contrast! If the image in the first couple is that of a sovereign shelter, then we move to the image of this idea of...

2. *Always renewing but ever fading.* The psalm ends with this always renewing and never fading. It is the light and the steadfast love because of his mercy. Our work is now established rather than meaningless. Our pursuits are purposeful rather than purposeless. Our lives take on substance and have the ability to move toward inheritance and legacy and the passing on to the next generation.

All of a sudden, that which seems insignificant and fruitless, no matter what you did or pursued, now becomes, as the apostle Paul would say, "We eat and drink to the glory of God," and everything becomes significant in him. Let me give you three very brief points. I'm not going to expound on them, but I do want you to consider them. If I could give you three applications points, they would be...

First, *request wisdom.* You need it. He has it. Request wisdom. Wisdom only comes through the fear of the Lord. It is radically relational. Let's as a church and as individuals move toward him and ask him that he would give us wisdom that we might know how to navigate life in such a way that we're marked by wisdom, that we're seeing the days God has given us, however many days they are, and that we would be marked by spending and investing those days wisely.

The question you have to ask yourself is...*How am I doing?* Is my life marked by wisdom? Am I investing my days wisely? Where have I gotten caught up in some vain pursuits? Am I moving down a river I never intended to be on? Request wisdom.

Secondly, *rejoice in mercy.* For you and me to be a people who live purposeful, intentional, meaningful, and significant lives, which my guess is we all long for, as we walk in wisdom and understanding of all that God has done for us in Christ... This wrath? We're no longer under it. This judgment is no longer ours. Forgiveness is now ours. Redemption is now ours. New life is now ours.

Because of that, we rejoice in mercy. We are a people who celebrate it and shout it and give it away and invite people into it as much as we can. Why? Because we have been redeemed. We've been reclaimed. We've been reborn. We've been made new. We have been born again into a wonderful life. We have been brought out of darkness into his wonderful light not because of something we have done but because he is a gracious and merciful God who extended an invitation to us as he extends it even yet again today. We are a people who rejoice in mercy.

Finally, *we redeem the time*. Why? Because if you understand what it means to walk in wisdom and if you're full of joy because of the mercy of God in your life, you're looking at life differently. You are just looking at life for ways that you might invest in that which you know is significant. If I could just encourage you, this psalm and the rest of Scriptures would say to you that your significance has more to do with your position in Christ than your job in the world.

I don't care what you do. If you're a businessman or a businesswoman, if you're a teacher or if you're a lawyer, if you're a doctor or you're a stay-at-home mom, if you're a student, if you're a husband or a wife, if you're a father or a brother or a sister... Whatever your role is, wherever you find yourself...

Look at me. What Moses is saying here at the end of Psalm 90 is that you and I have the opportunity to ask God to establish the work of our hands, whatever that work might be, and that work might be established while we're investing in things that will last, namely people, that we're investing in their lives hoping to see the next generation rise up and hoping to see men and women's lives changed and redeemed because of the mercy of God. This is our first order of business. "**...establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!**"

Just imagine with me what it would be like if we were a people who did that and if we were a church who was known for that. In this event we had for Lily and for Evan Bleecker earlier this week, essentially what we did was we stood before these young blossoming adults (these teenagers) and we said, "This is what we see in you." We called it out. We drew it out. If I could distill everything, it was essentially, "Don't waste your life. You have this life. Don't waste your life."

The way you waste your life when you had the young and the old in the room who were saying, "I have gone down this path. I have tried this aimless, fruitless, purposeless pursuit. Don't waste your life. Line your life up with him, and in him all of life begins to take on meaning and significance." What that in turn does for you and in you is it satisfies you in the morning with the steadfast love day in and day out until the end of days which are never ours because of Christ. Amen? Let's pray.

Father, we love you. We do thank you. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for the hope we have in your Son. I pray you would make us a people who are walking in wisdom and who are rejoicing in mercy and who are redeeming the time. I pray the words of Psalm 90 would ring in our

hearts throughout the day and, hopefully, throughout the week and that your Holy Spirit would do a good work in us. We ask all of this in Christ's name, amen.

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