

Mickey’s wife bought a new line of expensive cosmetics guaranteed to make her look years younger. After sitting for a lengthy time before the mirror applying the cosmetics, she asked, “Darling, honestly, what age would you say I am?” Looking over at her carefully, Mickey replied, “Judging from your skin, twenty; your hair, eighteen; and your figure, twenty five.” “Oh, you flatterer!” she gushed. “Hey, wait a minute,” Mickey said, “I haven’t added them up yet!”

Mickey might benefit from “*a heart of wisdom*” that the writer of Psalm 90 asks for. Psalm 90 is probably the oldest psalm written by the oldest man in the post-Genesis era. Psalm 90 is identified as a prayer of Moses—the man of God. The timeline of the psalm spans from eternity (1-2) to the future (3-11) and then back again to the present (12-17). You can often hear Psalm 90 read at funeral services, probably because it speaks of both mortality and eternity.

Psalm 90 presents a fundamental question, not really about the quantity of life, even though the psalm mentions that, “*Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures.*” Psalm 90 focuses more on the quality of life. We should be asking ourselves, “What difference has our life made?” Psalm 90 has a perfect answer for that question that reflects past, present and future.

It begins by stating that God himself is our permanent dwelling. *1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.* The Message Bible and the New Living Translation use a term that conveys a more common English usage with the word “*home*” instead of “*dwelling place*.” Listen to The Message version of verses 1 and 2: “*God, it seems you’ve been our home forever; Long before the mountains were born, Long before you brought earth itself to birth, from ‘once upon a time’ to ‘kingdom come’ - you are God.*” Isn’t that a winsome translation?

One of the most famous golfers in the world is Tiger Woods, who became the youngest-ever winner of the U.S. Amateur Championship at age 18. But when Woods turned 40 in 2015, USA Today printed an article titled “*Tiger Woods turns 40, but it sure looks like 70.*” Another article said, “*Tiger Woods at 40: Down and in pain, but not yet ready to call it a career.*” In his career he’s cashed in for more than \$1 billion, according to *Forbes* magazine. Tiger was so great everybody thought he would break Jack Nicklaus’ record of 18 majors but he stopped at 15 in 2008. The physical toll from unleashing one of the most powerful swings in the game did some damage to his body. Tiger did not play from the time he had three surgical procedures for his ailing back in August 2015 until earlier this year when he had to withdraw from a tournament because of his back. Age has caught up to the golfing Phenom. Aging is the wild card in almost every line of work, if we’re honest.

Let me ask you a question: Out of 150 psalms how many prayers are titled as “A prayer of so and so...” The answer is only five. Three are from David (17, 86, and 142), one is from Moses (90) and one unidentified except as “*A prayer of an afflicted person*” (102). So Psalm 90 is a prayer, but also a psalm and a poem—in that order. The Hebrew word for “prayer” does not appear in any of the Bible’s books

attributed to Moses until Psalm 90. The verb form of the word occurs in the Torah three times as Moses prays for the people (Num. 11:2 and 21:7, Deut. 9:26). Rabbinic tradition assigns the next 10 Psalms to Moses also. Other songs written by Moses can be found in Exodus 15, and in Deuteronomy 32. Psalm 90-106 is titled Book IV of the Psalms. Book IV begins with this powerful and noteworthy prayer.

Of all the 150 psalms in the Bible, only Psalm 90 begins with the respectful address, “*Lord*” (*Adonai*). That itself makes it a distinctive and distinguished prayer. *Adonai* means Master which means more than just Maker; it means the Commander, the Chief and Controller of your life and not just the Creator or companion. It means the Big Boss first before Best friend. The noun “*dwelling place*” is sometimes translated “home” as I mentioned before. Our home is our place to reside, to retreat, to reflect, to relax and to rest. A dwelling place is not just a house, but a home, a harbor. The phrase “*all generations*” is an echo of God’s revelation in Exodus 3:15 that is scattered throughout the Psalms. In Hebrew, “*all generations*” is more like “generation after generation.” It is a continuous and consistent relationship with God. A confident relationship.

There are three words associated with time in verses 1 and 2: “*generations, before, and everlasting.*” The Lord’s presence and promise are unstopping, unchanging and unerring. The Lord wants to establish a firm and fixed relationship, not a fleeting relationship. Verse 2 reveals that the Lord by nature is an everlasting, eternal God, so his relationship with us is not short-lived. It is a generational, growing and grounded relationship. All of human life is characterized by decline. Only the Lord is faithful forever.

Yet all life will take a powerful decline. Verses 3 and 4 say: *You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.” A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*

In Greek legend, the Sphinx devoured all travelers who could not answer the riddle it posed. The Sphinx is said to have guarded the entrance to the Greek city of Thebes, and to have asked this riddle of travelers to allow them passage: “What speaks with one voice, but walks on four legs, on two legs, and on three legs?” If no one could answer the question, the monster would eat one of the people of the city. Finally a hero came along, named Oedipus. He answered the riddle saying: “It is man who crawls on all fours when he is small, walks on two legs when he is grown, and hobbles with a cane, thus having three legs when he is old.”

Moses is depicting the Lord as someone entirely opposite the Sphinx. The Lord does not devour people. The Everlasting God nevertheless holds the power of life and death. Beginning in verse 3, three “You have’s” stand out: “*You turn people back to dust*” (v. 3), “*You sweep people away in the sleep of death*” (v. 5), and “*You have set our iniquities before you*” (v. 8). The Psalm continues to point our attention to the Lord our God with poetic repetition: “*In your sight*” and “*In the night*” in verse 4). Then, “*In the light...of your presence*” in verse 8.

In Psalm 90 God's permanence is contrasted with the passing of time and human existence so we can clearly see the timelessness of God from all generations—from everlasting to everlasting. The person of God is contrasted with the transitory, terminal nature of human life. We are mortal. We are dust.

*“Turn and return”* in verse 3 are really the same word, of which the second is an imperative. There is no choice in the matter. We will revert to dust. The verb form for the word *“dust”* in the story of Job is “crushed” (Job 4:19), or “broken in pieces” (Job 19:2). It may happen in a thousand years (v 4), a day, a watch (a few hours) in the night, morning (v 5) or evening, whether to mountains (v 2), to mortals (v 3) or to grass in the meadow (v 5). But it happens to us all, like grass that is watered and wonderful in the morning and in the evening it is withered and wasted. All nature and all things are passing, never permanent. One moment it sprouts, the next it withers.

There are three different anger words in Psalm 90: *“anger”* (aph) and *“indignation”* (chemah) in verse 7 and *“wrath”* (ebrah) in verse 9. Anger is related to a body part in Hebrew, the nostril, to be exact. I guess it brings to mind a flared nostril. Indignation is the behavior one exhibits when angry. And wrath is the boundary line that is crossed. *“Consumed by your anger”* in verse 7 signifies the end. We are over the line, finished.

Verse 12 is the turning point of the Psalm: *“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* The remaining verses contain six requests that the psalm writer finds necessary to live a meaningful life: *“Teach us...Relent Lord...Satisfy us...Make us glad...May your deeds be shown...and May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us.”*

Kobe Bryant retired from the NBA in 2016. He started his career at age 17 and played until he was 37, elderly for NBA standards. He played 1037 games, 47,592 minutes and scored 32,967 points. The hard-driving player was asked what advice he'd offer an 18-year-old Kobe today. He said, “We were having a team meeting and Rick Fox said, ‘Kobe, we just want to feel like you need us.’ ‘I was like, ‘What are you talking [about]?’ But then, it kind of caught me, because it was a very vulnerable thing for him to say, and it helped me have perspective on what he may be going through and what he's feeling. And then, it really changed how I looked at it...I made a big transition when I started to understand that my teammates viewed me like some machine who didn't feel anything and was oblivious to pressure,” Bryant says. “They found that very unrelatable. I had to explain that I had the same fears, flaws and vulnerabilities, so they could relate to me.” (<http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/nba-ball-dont-lie/kobe-wishes-he-could-tell-his-young-self-to-understand-compassion-212238852.html>)

We have to acknowledge and appreciate all of our days. Our purpose is to spend our time wisely, not worriedly. Our purpose is most certainly not to cross out the days on the calendar, but to commit all of our days to the Lord. It is not to wait for death to come, but to “number our day”—that is, to value them. Facing the troubling realities of life with faith in the Lord, who is our home, *“our dwelling place,”* is the prayer which Moses the man of God gave to the Psalter and in turn to all of us. Pray it sincerely and pray it humbly. *“May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us...”* Amen.