

HOW FAST THE YEARS FLY

By Dr. Rick Perrin, from Psalm 90:1-17

“A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by.” Psalm 90:4

For Christmas one of my sons gave me the book, *Steel Dynasty*. It's about the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s when they became the best team in the National Football League and won four Super Bowls in six years. I've been living in a glorious haze for the past two weeks reliving it all. But I came to one small, significant sentence that left me blank. I was reading about 1974, the season the Steelers won their first Super Bowl. The sentence said, “[Chuck] Noll reinstated Bradshaw on October 28, and the Steelers rolled in a 24-17 win over Atlanta.” I nudged Barb and said, “I don't remember that.”

Let me give you a little background. The Steelers drafted Terry Bradshaw as the first pick of the 1970 draft. Terry took a while to mature in the NFL. In 1974 he lost his starting position to Joe Gilliam. Gilliam was a phenomenal passer. He led the Steelers to four preseason victories and continued the magic with wins in the first four regular season games. Then came a tie, then an embarrassing 17-0 loss to the Raiders. Gilliam was showing signs of the erratic behavior and later drug abuse that would leave him homeless on the streets a few years later. So on October 28 Chuck Noll benched Gilliam, and Terry Bradshaw led the Steelers for the rest of a very good decade. You'd think I'd recall the day the quarterbacks changed. It was big news in Pittsburgh. But I said, “Barb, I don't remember it.”

She looked at me with a withering glare and said, “You idiot! Don't you remember where we were?” And then, yes, I did remember. It was Monday night. We were in the hospital. Barb was in labor. Around 6:30 PM our doctor said, “I have tickets for the football game. Your baby's not coming anytime soon. I'll be back later.” And he was gone. Of course, around halftime our first son, Tim, was born. He was baptized at church on Super Bowl Sunday. To me it seems like yesterday. I can tell you every detail of what happened that night (except for the football game). But thirty-three years have zipped. A day ago I was a young dad. Today I'm a grandfather.

We need to know how to value our time. Turn with me to Psalm 90. This psalm was written by Moses. It's the only psalm with his by-line on it. He composed it nearly 3500 years ago, so it's the oldest datable poem in the book of Psalms. Psalm 90 has much to teach us about life and how fast it goes and how we should use our time. The context is important. Moses didn't write this psalm while he was a prince of Egypt. Or during his years as a shepherd in the wastelands. Or when he was leading Israel out of Egypt at the Exodus. Most likely he wrote it during the discouraging and frustrating time Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness. Moses took time to think and then to pray. Then he wrote down three things we need to know and four things we need to pray about. If we are going to get life right in the short time we have on earth, we need to pay attention. Otherwise, we'll find ourselves at the end of life and it will be too late.

Let's start with the **three things we need to know**. The first of these is **the eternal nature of God**. Moses begins with these words in verse 1, “*Lord, You have been*

our dwelling place in all generations.” Moses could think back to the witness of his mom and dad. The people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. When Pharaoh ordered that every Hebrew baby boy must be killed at birth, Moses’ parents refused and turned to God for help. You remember his Moses’ mom placed him in a little basket and floated him in the Nile past the royal bathing place where Pharaoh’s daughter plucked him out of the water and saved his life. Moses inherited his parents’ faith. But his parents inherited their faith from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three men had followed God and served him and turned to him in trouble. And their faith was handed down through each generation. So Moses had this long line of family members who trusted God. It’s a great blessing for any man or woman to have such a heritage of faith and a history of God’s faithfulness. Over and over the people of Israel turned to God for help and refuge, and generation after generation they found him to be true.

But God had been there before Abraham. In verse 2 and Moses says, “God, You were there *‘before the mountains were born, or You gave birth to the earth and the world.’*” Man didn’t invent God. God invented man. If God was the Creator, Moses could go back still farther, to before the creation. He says again in verse 2, “*Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*” God has always been there. That God is eternal is hard for us to get our hands around. But it is the only thing that makes sense. God is and always has been..

The second thing we need to know is **the essential frailty of man**. Moses draws a contrast between God and man. In verse 3 he writes, “*You turn man back into dust.*” Moses knew the history of man’s origin. In the beginning God scraped together the materials of the earth and made our bodies. This has an implication. Not very long ago those of you who are now getting on a bit in years were young and attractive and virile and vibrant—just like the good-looking young adults here this morning. When you were their age you took it all for granted. Just like they do. But one of the hard realities comes when we who are older meet someone we haven’t seen in a while, and he says to us, “You’re looking pretty good!” And we know we’re never going to look that good again! Baseball great Satchel Paige said, “Never look back. Someone may be gaining on you!” Moses says, “Never look back. The dust is catching up!”

In verse 4 Moses says God doesn’t feel the effects of age. “*A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by.*” John McCain, if he is elected President will be 72 when he is inaugurated, the oldest President ever. To answer critics about his age, he trots out his 95 year old mother and he says, “Don’t worry! I’ve got good genes.” But which of us would have wanted Strom Thurmond to be President when he was 95? God’s not impressed by a hundred years. A thousand years for God, Moses says, is like one day for us. Our time on this earth is pretty brief, as time goes. In verse 5 Moses says we’re like grass that pops up fresh in the morning but withers that evening. If you have an extra \$350,000 there is now a company up in Cambridge, Massachusetts that will chart your complete genetic code for you. They’re marketing to hypochondriacs and their sympathizers so these people may know if they’re likely to drop over at age forty from a heart attack or die at thirty from some rare kind of cancer. So far, nobody’s bought.

Death will arrive soon enough, and that kind of money won't get you an extra minute's life. Don't deceive yourself about how long you'll live. You and I haven't much time.

The third thing we need to know is the **effects of sin**. In verse 7 Moses thinks about the situation facing the people of Israel. "*We have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we have been dismayed.*" Israel was wandering in the wilderness because when God told them to enter the promised land, they refused. They feared giants they thought lived in the land more than they trusted God who split the Red Sea before their very eyes. So God banished them to the wilderness until all the adults of that generation died. There are consequences when we don't obey God. Many of us suffer in life because we don't do what God wants us to do. It will either be God or the wilderness. That's the first effect of sin.

A second effect of sin is found in verse 8. Moses says, "*You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence.*" You can hide your secret sins from people. Others may not know what's in your heart, or the things you've whispered behind closed doors. They may not know what you've looked at or where you've gone, or what you've taken that isn't yours, or where you've failed to do your duty. Other people may think you are quite an upstanding Christian. But God knows. He sees our secret sins. I came face to face with this when I was in high school. A man and his wife joined our church. They helped with the youth group. They became personal friends with my parents. The congregation elected him as an elder. But what nobody realized was that this man was systematically borrowing money from a number of members of the church to prop up his business. And when the debts got to be more than he could repay, he disappeared. He left his wife without a word, changed his name, and no one heard from him again. We found out later he'd done this before. He'd been someone else before he married his wife. Now he was someone else again. He'd fooled everybody. To some extent many of us try a bit of that. We hide who we really are. But God sees who we really are. We can't hide from him. Our sins remain on his books.

Then we have a third effect of sin. The people of Israel were God's people. He provided for them in the wilderness. But Moses says in verse 9, that that generation "*declined in Your fury. We have finished our years like a sigh.*" Isn't that a good description of how most of us end our lives? Not with a shout, but with a sigh. Seventeen or eighteen years ago I did a little work in a residence for the elderly. One woman who lived there was the daughter of a powerful official in President Eisenhower's administration. He had literally shaped world events. His daughter too was very accomplished. She was the first woman attorney admitted to the Bar in Connecticut. But now she sat in a chair and stared out at life. She ended not with a burst of energy or exertion of will. She died with a sigh, a whisper. You and I will end up like that too. In verse 10 Moses says people live about seventy years. Maybe you'll get to eighty. Moses died at 120. But the last years of an older person's life are beset by pills and pains and limitations and memories. Moses says of our lives, "*It is soon gone and we fly away.*"

In verse 11 Moses gives us a fourth effect of sin. He asks an interesting question. "*Who understands the power of Your anger?*" The answer is, only Jesus Christ does.

Jesus went to the cross. He understood the power of Roman anger. But that was nothing compared to the anger of God. On the cross Jesus endured the infinite wrath of God you and I deserve for our sin. But you and I do not need to experience that personally. We may escape it by turning to Christ and putting our faith in him, trusting that his payment for sin is sufficient. Make sure you are forgiven, shielded by Christ from God's anger.

Moses concludes this section in verse 12, *“Teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.”* What is wisdom? Realize that your life is short. Know it is short because you and I are sinners. Understand how sinful you really are. And acknowledge that your only hope is to repudiate your sin and to trust in Jesus Christ to save you. The really wise person commits himself to seek God and serves him as the number one priority in his life. How wise are you?

Now Moses tells us **four things we need to pray about**. First, we should pray for **Grace**. *“Do return, O Lord...and be sorry for Your servants”* Moses says in verse 13. I think Moses felt the sting of God's withdrawal from Israel. Oh, God hadn't gone too far. He was still near enough to guide them and help them when they faced trouble. But Moses felt the distance. I don't know if you've had that experience. Some of us are satisfied with keeping God at arm's length. We want his help when we need it but we don't want God to get too intimate with us. I was talking with a fellow some time ago and he told me about his relationship with his father. His dad was one of those tough, unresponsive men who like bossing other people around and never allow themselves to show affection. My friend said, “All I've ever wanted from my dad is that he would give me a hug and tell me that he loves me and that he's proud of me. But he won't do that.” He said, “I keep trying to earn his approval, but he never gives it.” There's real pain in that man's lament. I think this is something like Moses was feeling about God. Israel had disobeyed God after all he had done for them in the Exodus. Now they couldn't make him come and tell them he loved them. So Moses pleads with God, “Lord, won't you come back? My heart aches because you're keeping away. Come back and put your arms around us and tell us that you love us.” That's a prayer we each ought to pray. Do you long for God to love you, to come and feel sorry for you in your trouble? Friends, God did that in Jesus Christ. Like Moses, pray and plead with Jesus, “Lord, please come to me in mercy. I want so much to have you love me again and hold me close. I know I don't deserve it. But please God, come anyway!” You can't make him come, but that's what he delights to do. Won't you ask him today?

The second thing we need to pray for is **Gladness**. Listen to what Moses says in verses 14-15. *“Satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen evil.”* We have a rule in our family: No singing before breakfast. Nothing is more obnoxious to me than a person who wakes up happy. I need coffee before I want to hear music! And yet, there is something wonderful when you wake up and you're so glad you just can't help but sing. Like that song from the musical *Oklahoma*. “Oh, what a beautiful morning, Oh, what a beautiful day! I've got a wonderful feeling everything's going my way!” You may be wandering in the wilderness of life. It's hard and we're full of life's pain and sorrow. What we want and

need more than anything is to have some evidence that God is at last answering our prayers and turning our sorrows into joy. If things are hard for you right now, don't fall into despair. I Peter 5:7 says "*Cast... all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*" God does answer our prayers. Not always soon. But he does turn sad hearts to gladness. Learn to take your problems to God.

Third, we need to pray for our **grandchildren**. One of the greater ironies in the tabloid world is that Lynne Spears, the mother of Britney, was writing a book on parenting for a Christian publisher. It would have been released on Mothers' Day. One wonders about her qualification as a guide for other parents when out-of-control Britney has lost custody of her two children, and Britney's sister, Jamie, at age 16 is pregnant. Something's not right in a family like this one. In verse 16 Moses prays, "*Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your majesty to their children.*" This is not a prayer for the generation that was slowly perishing in the wilderness. Moses appeals to God on behalf of their children of that first generation. They would be the ones who would attempt the second invasion of the promised land, and Moses asks God to give them victory. Then he prays for their children, the grandchildren, that they will reap the benefits of living in the promised land. God answered his prayer when the walls of Jericho fell, and the path opened to the land of Canaan. You may have led your children into the wilderness. Perhaps you had a poor example to follow. But nevertheless, you can pray for your children and grandchildren even from the wilderness. Pray that God will lead them to a better place, a land of promise and blessing. They can be better off than you have been, and your grandchildren than their parents. If you faithfully pray God delights to answer.

Finally, we should pray for **glory**. In verse 17 Moses prays, "*Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and do confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands.*" People don't raise monuments in the desert. The wilderness is a place of drifting sand that wipes out the traces of the people who pass there. If you are in the wilderness of life you may feel that what you do is isn't important or that you'll never count for much. But it doesn't need to be that way. God can raise a monument for you. Someone has pointed out the difference between King Herod and Jesus. Herod built buildings as his monument. He rebuilt the glorious temple in Jerusalem. He constructed magnificent edifices, and people still marvel at their ruins. Jesus' monuments were people. You and I should invest in people too. Ask God to bless what you do and he'll turn it into a monument. It could be your children. Maybe it will be people you bring to Christ. Perhaps it will be work you do in the church that enables others to touch people's lives. I wonder if Moses felt he was a failure. All he had done had fallen apart. So in the wilderness he prayed, and God made his work so significant that in every list of the five most influential people in human history, you find Moses. Ask God to make your life count. The years are flying by. Soon our lives will be over. Live your life for Christ, and by God's grace he will make you glad, you'll see your grandchildren blessed, and he'll give you glory. That's the way to live!

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