

THE DAILY CHOICE OF GRATITUDE

Daily Embracing Life's Brevity

Psalm 90:1-12

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-daily-choice-of-gratitude/>

If this psalm were a painting, the background would be God's eternity and the foreground would be our brevity. The contrast. The psalms are nothing if not honest—life is brief, uncertain and full of heartache. So here's the thought, as it connects to our sermon series. **In light of life's brevity and uncertainty, how may I become more grateful and more generous?** Remember Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*? He reminded us to begin with the end in mind. What do you want said at your funeral? How do you want to be remembered? What would you like your final, remaining financial gifts to say about your life's loves? Then work your way backwards!

The word pictures used by the psalmist give us clues about how brief life is. We will be returned to dust (v. 3), which is a link to Gen. 3:19, which we read on Ash Wednesday each year. Dust! Remember the story of the little girl who heard Genesis 3:19 taught in her Sunday School class? From dust we came, to dust we shall return. The next day, she reached a for a toy under her bed, saw all the dust and hollered, "Momma, there's someone under our bed, but I don't know if he is coming or going." We sing the hymn, "Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail, in thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail." A rabbi once told his student that we should each carry two stones in our pocket. One, to remind us of how grand we are, made by God, and special. The other stone to remind us "I am but dust and ashes."

Then he says our lives are like a watch in the night—a three-hour shift (v. 4)! Wow, it goes fast. Next, life is like green grass (vv. 5-6), which looks as if it could last forever, thriving, but it is soon gone. Bill Hybels flips this on its head and says the next time you mow your grass, remember, your lawn will outlive you! Someday, this land will be someone else's.

So here is a new thought I received from someone recently. What if the wrath of God mentioned in this psalm (vv. 7, 9) is not so much against our moral wrongs but against our arrogance and pretension that we are more than mortal? So we're back to our theme for this series. **In light of life's brevity and uncertainty, how may I become more grateful and more generous?**

Don't you wonder what triggered this psalm? Was it a national crisis? Did a friend or loved one die suddenly? Somehow, the psalmist came face to face with life's brevity. And so after pondering all of this, he offers this prayer, which I almost always include in my committal prayer at graveside services: "So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart" (v. 12). To live for the things that matter, the things that last. Do we? Are you?

We all know how life goes. You just pay off a loan, fantasizing about how you're going to spend all that freed up money, and the car breaks down or the kids need braces. Or your weekend looks open and then twelve things rush in to fill it. Do you know what has to happen with our time and money? We have to reflect on the brevity of life and get there first, with v. 12, with our primary

commitments, and then let other things fill in around it, or drop them. A consumer culture is out there and says to us, “God loves you...and WE have a wonderful plan for your life!” The antidote from this cultural disease is v. 12.

Eugene Peterson tells of the time he and his wife spent at a Benedictine monastery. The path from the chapel to the dining hall led through the cemetery. Peterson’s wife saw an open grave and commented, “Oh, one of the brothers just died?” “No,” came the reply, “that is for the next one.” Three times a day, on their way to meals, the monks passed by an open grave. [*The Pastor*, p. 289].

Someone has wondered what it was like when the first humans experienced the death of a loved one. Staring into the face of the deceased, they must have wondered, “Is that all there is? Can this happen to me? What comes next?” [*The Good Funeral*, Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch, p. 58]. We could add to these questions: **In light of life’s brevity and uncertainty, how may I become more grateful and more generous?** Every breath we draw is a gift, a bonus, not an entitlement. Yet God, who inhabits eternity, has chosen to fill our brief time here with dignity, purpose and the possibility of relationship between God and us. So, we choose gratitude.