

# ***I Once Was What You Are, and What I am, You Also Will Be***

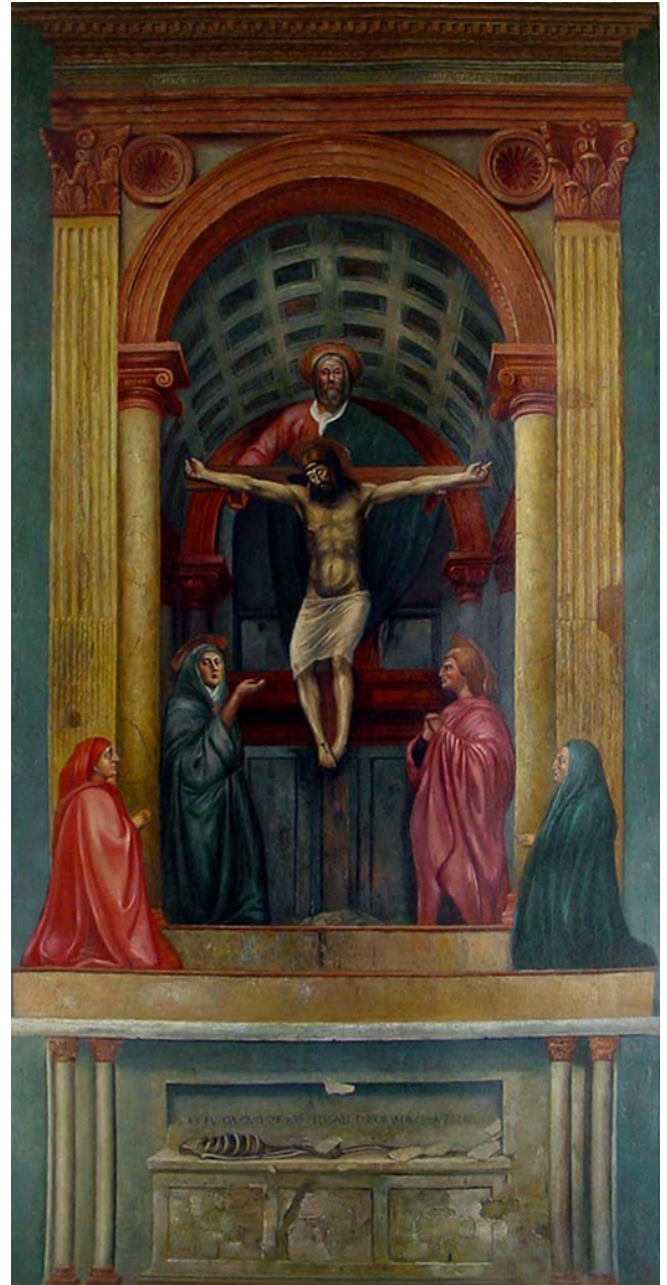
## PSALM 90

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.  
 3 You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."  
 4 A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.  
 5 Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning:  
 6 In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.  
 7 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.  
 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.  
 9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.  
 10 Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.  
 11 If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.  
 12 Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.  
 13 Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.  
 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.  
 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.  
 16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.

17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands.

### Introduction:

One of the most famous works of the Early Italian Renaissance is a fresco by a painter named Masaccio. It is located in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella, in Florence. It is called *The Holy Trinity*. Below the artist's depiction of the Trinity is a tomb. The tomb consists of a sarcophagus on which lies a skeleton. "Carved" in the wall above the skeleton is an inscription:  
 "IO FU[ ] G[ ] A QUEL CHE  
 VOI S[ ] ETE E QUEL CH[ ]  
 I[ ] SONO VO[ ] A[ ] N[ ] C[ ] OR[ ]  
 SARETE"  
*(I once was  
 what you are,  
 and what I am,  
 you also will be).*



The imagery of a skeleton and the engraved phrase encouraged people to consider the shortness of their lives and inevitable death. The message was clear. The painting was intended to serve as a lesson to the viewers.

Since all will die, the artist wanted each viewer to be thinking deeply about their own mortality and future destiny.

Having personally seen a few cremations in Japan, imagery such as this has an even greater chance of impact for us - especially when it is not just a painting but reality. *When the remaining bones of a loved one are seen cooling on the steel gurney...our thoughts are not usually on what television show we are missing at the moment.*

Psalm 90 is a powerful and heartfelt prayer to God concerning life. It invites us to think deeply about the things that matter most in life. Life is precious. Life is short. Death is inevitable. Where am I going when I die? Giving serious thought to our ultimate destiny can shape the way we live in the present.

### What Am I Doing?

Life is short. The Psalmist used the imagery of grass to make this point. Grass in



Israel did not grow for long. In the span of a single day it would spring up new and

in the evening it would be dry and withered (vs 5,6). With our lives being compared to such a short time, are we spending our time doing the right things? **Some people have spent their whole lives passionately trying to achieve what they thought was the right thing. They climbed what they thought was the 'ladder of success', only to find out that when they got to the**



**top, they had placed the 'ladder' on the wrong wall.** When they got to the end of their life, they realized they had wasted their time. Careful consideration of our ultimate destiny helps determine many of the choices and decisions we make in the present.

### Where Am I Going?

Since our lives are short and frail, we are encouraged to consider our final end, and what will become of us after we die.

Vs. 8 says "God has set our iniquities before Him. Our

secret sins in the light of His presence." God sees the wrong things that we do, even the secret wrong things! He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and expose the motives of people's hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5). There will come a judgment and all sin will be punished. Each person is destined to die once and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible is very clear that there is a heaven and there is a hell.

During His earthly ministry Jesus lovingly warned people about not trusting in their own goodness to earn favor with God. Jesus explained that if we trust in our own performance, we are only fooling ourselves and destined for Hell. (Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 23:15)

This Psalm and other passages of God's word direct us to give careful thought concerning the **last things in life**- things such as death, judgment, hell and heaven. *Thinking about these things first* can help guide us in what we need to do, where we want to be and what is most important. It is never too late to change the direction of our life, as long as we are alive.

### What is Most Important?

In verse 12 of this Psalm, The Psalmist writes *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*

The purpose of "numbering our days" is not merely to count them and try and determine how many they are in an arithmetical way.

While researching for this message, I was shocked to see an Internet site that exists for people to calculate the date of their death. The site's advertisement states:

*The Internet's friendly reminder that life is slipping away... second by second. Like the hourglass...this site will remind you just how short life is.*

After entering certain personal information, the Internet site supposedly gives you the day you will die.

No, numbering our days is not some kind of morbid exercise to figure out with a computer!

Numbering our days is meant to lead us to what is most important in life. **It is more than just reconsidering what we are doing. It is a change of heart. It is gaining a heart of wisdom in a relationship with God as our Teacher.**

This Psalm is directed to God. Who our teacher is, makes all the difference in the world! If you are your own teacher, you'll be doing whatever you think is most important. Your own heart may tell you life is short so experience all the pleasure you can. Or accumulate all the wealth you can. But what is on

God's heart? What does it mean to gain a heart of wisdom?

To gain a heart of wisdom is to have our hearts submitted to and under the loving authority of The Teacher...God himself...the one who created us and gave us the very life we are to value and celebrate!

Unless God is our teacher, we will not be convinced of sin, God's righteousness, or coming judgment. We will not be earnestly concerned about our future destiny. **Without God as our teacher, we may number our days, and even consider**



**the shortness of them, but still never gain a heart of wisdom.**

The Psalmist whom God spoke through to write these words was Moses. Moses had a lot of experience with God as his teacher. In this Psalm, Moses made no pretence (he didn't try and gloss over) about the realities of life, death, sin, as well as the wrath and favor of God. Moses personally understood God's favor and his anger. The Bible tells us that God spoke to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend (Exodus 33:11) **Now that's experiencing God's favor!**

*Moses found favor with God not because of his own performance but through personal faith in God's promised redeemer.*

Moses was also not permitted to enter the promised-land because of his disobedience (Deuteronomy 3:25,26) **Now that's experiencing God's righteous anger! God's righteous anger would eventually be poured out fully on the promised redeemer.**

Moses also personally understood much about life and death. He experienced the miraculous life-saving of many through the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. He also personally understood much about death. It is estimated (in one commentary) that during the 40 years of wandering in the desert, as Moses lead the people of Israel, there were at least fifteen thousand funerals. Another source said "over one million people died". The highest estimate comes to about eighty-seven funerals a day! So, over the forty-year period, Moses and the Israelites were faced with this duty, day after day - **several times a day**- burying their dead.

Moses was surrounded by death and grief. He could write about these important issues with a heart of wisdom. God was his teacher!

Moses ends this Psalm with the heartfelt request that God's favor may rest upon them.

In matters as weighty as life and death, what does it mean for the favor of the Lord our God to rest upon us?

Favor between God and humanity is not an automatic given. It took the sacrifice of Jesus to achieve it. It requires personal faith in Jesus to enjoy it. **At the cross, God displayed the strength of His wrath against sin and the power of His love and mercy. God's favor is by grace alone as the Holy Spirit works in people's hearts to bring about repentance and faith in Jesus.** A heart of wisdom looks to Jesus and His performance as our security in life and death. Looking to Jesus and His performance leads us to what is most important in both life and death.

Many of you have probably heard of the group Campus Crusade for Christ or CCC as it is referred to in Japan. Perhaps less known is the name of its founder. His name was Bill Bright. He was used of God as a visionary leader to help start an organization that has shared the gospel around the world.

He also had an incurable respiratory disease.

Bill Bright spoke to a gathering of Christian leaders and young people just before his death. At the time he spoke, he was actually living past the time the doctors had expected he would live. Weak, frail and hooked up to oxygen, he was brought into the meeting in a wheelchair. He knew it might be the last time he met with these people. The man whom many consider to be one of the greatest visionary leaders of this generation did not choose to lecture on vision and strategy. His

focus was not on all the good things he had done. It was on what Jesus had done for him!!

His message *as a dying man* was this, he said to them "Don't see God as *useful*, see him as *beautiful*". His carefully chosen words were on the importance of loving God and loving people. His challenge to his listeners was to make the most important thing in life—your love for God and your love for people. In his life he had accomplished many things.



But his final words echoed strongly the words of I Corinthians 13:1-3: ***"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but do not have love, I gain nothing."***

What mattered most in the end was love. He knew he had received God's love in Christ. He knew God's favor was not upon him because of his performance. He was reveling in God's grace...with all his remaining time and strength he implored others to *"see God as beautiful!"*

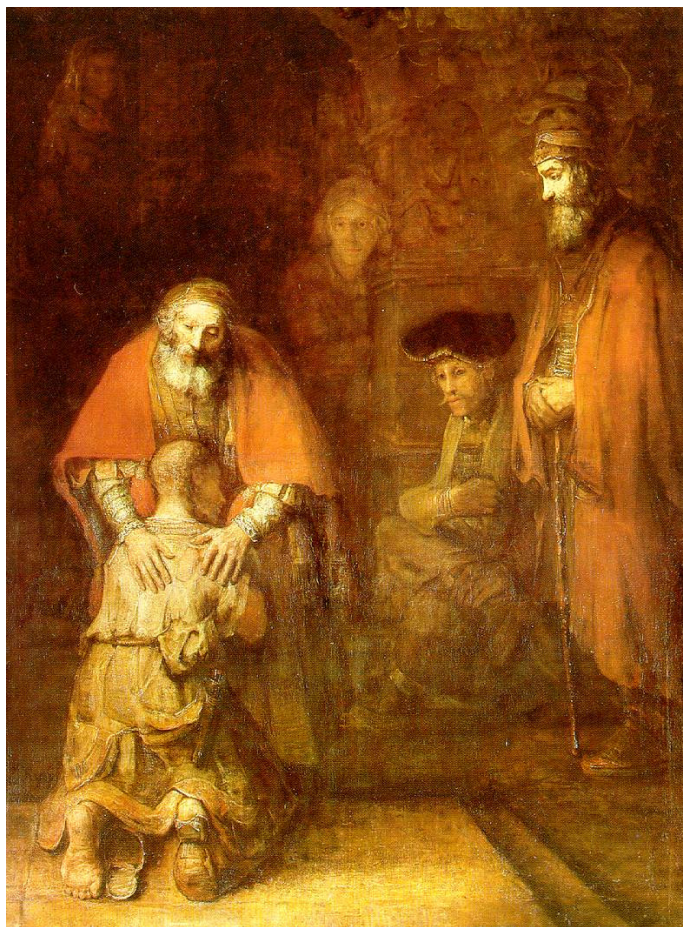
John Piper, in his book "Don't Waste Your Life" writes, "God created us to live with a single passion: to joyfully display his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life. The wasted life is a life without this passion. God calls us to pray and think and dream and plan and work not to be made much of (*not so we will be great*), but to make much of him (*so that God will be great, glorified*) in every part of our lives" (*italics, mine*).

God's grace to us in Christ makes this possible.

There is a painting (*I started with a painting and I would like to end with a painting*) that hangs in the Hermitage Museum in St.

Petersburg, Rome. The painting is called the Return of the Prodigal. It is Rembrandt's last unfinished painting and it was discovered in his apartment at that time of his death in 1669. His subject matter was taken from Jesus parable in Luke 15. Rembrandt depicts the deep and unceasing love of the father for his wayward son who has returned home. The love of God that Rembrandt was so beautifully able to paint on canvas, God made reality.

Verse 14 of this Psalm refers to God's "kind love". It is a special word in Hebrew. It is "HESED". It means the love that God **goes on giving us**, even when we do not obey him. That is why the psalm says "every morning". God never stops loving those on whom His favor rests! The very reason for our existence is to be united with God in love for eternity! Jesus Christ did all that was necessary for us to know and experience this love! It is what is most important in life.



***Life is short.*** Think about it. What would be like to start every morning knowing you are under God's favor.

*Wouldn't it make a difference in how you lived?*

***Death is inevitable.***

Think about it. What would be like to know that your future destiny is secure and unchangeable. And it is good...***really GOOD.*** *Wouldn't it make a difference in your approach to death?*

Teach us God. Please God, ***You*** be the one who teaches us to number our days. May we realize the shortness of this earthly life.

There is a date that represents the time we entered this world. We all know that.

There is another date though, a date that will complete our time on earth. Only God knows this...and He is telling us today in His word, *life is short.*

Teach us to number our days. Work in us, that we may gain a **heart of wisdom** ...a heart that is submitted to and under your loving authority. ...a heart that can experience what is most important in life. ...a heart that can delight in your love and favor.

Lets pray:

***Dear Heavenly Father,***

***Our life is a gift from you.***

***Enable us to spend it well.***

***Its almost certain that many of us have different opinions about life, death, judgment, hell and heaven.***

***These different opinions define for us what a meaningful life is.***

***These opinions shape our life now!***

***But mere opinions soon crumble and fade in the harsh light of reality***

***Thank you that Your word is true.***

***As the Author of Life, you have given us more than an opinion.***

***You have revealed life, death, judgment, hell and heaven as it really is.***

*Enable us to ponder these  
things according to your  
word.*

*Life is short.*

*Teach us to number our  
days,  
That we may gain a heart of  
wisdom...*

*that we may spend our lives  
dwelling in your love and  
favor.*

*We pray all this in the name  
of Jesus,*

*Amen*