God is Forever
Psalms 90:1-12
SS Lesson for 11/14/10

Devotional Scripture: Ps 102:24-27

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The outline of the lesson came from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary. This week’s lesson reviews the Eternality of God. The study's aim is to show that God is eternal and we are finite and that He is a great protector. The study's application is to know that we are frail and finite beings and that God, the eternal One, can protect us when we look to Him.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Life Is Short
My father passed away on April 1, 2008, of leukemia at age 90. He had lived 10 years beyond the 80 years of Psalm 90:10 (part of today’s text). The year before, I had the opportunity to take him on a trip back to his roots in southeast Alabama. He showed me where he was born and grew up. There’s a marker on the side of the road that tells the story of my great-grandfather and the settlement named after him. The old three-room schoolhouse where my dad received all of his formal education still stands, but with a tree growing through the porch roof. As we left that place, he commented “Life is short!” Indeed—one day you are a child and the next day an adult and another day you are old. Dad’s earthly claim to fame was his induction into Georgia’s Country Music Hall of Fame. He was a fiddler. He was happy with that, but I wished for more. In his 90 short years, my dad chose not to be a Christian.

Lesson Background

We noted in Lesson 5 that the Psalms are divided into five “books.” Psalm 90, today’s text, begins the fourth of these five. Many scholars consider this section of the Psalms (that is, Psalms 90–106) to be the answer to the problem presented in the first three books: the Davidic dynasty established, Psalm 2; the flourishing of that dynasty, Psalm 72; and the failure of that dynasty, Psalm 89. The emphasis in this fourth section is simply Yahweh reigns! (see Psalms 93, 96–99). Here, finally, the problem presented in the first three books is stated. Human kings may disappoint us, but Yahweh is our king, and he reigns forever. He is the king who through Moses led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. In this light, Book IV of the Psalms has something of a Mosaic flavor (notice that the superscription of Psalm 90 attributes it to Moses). Book IV ends with two views of the wilderness wandering, which was led by Moses: God’s viewpoint (Psalm 105) and Israel’s viewpoint (Psalm 106). The former is about God’s faithfulness to the covenant promises, while the latter is about Israel’s sinfulness and failure to obey God and keep the covenant.

Evaluating the connection between Book III and Book IV, we see Psalm 89 connected with Psalm 90 by the common topics of the brevity of life (89:47, 48; 90:3–6) and divine wrath (89:46; 90:7–10). Notice too the question How long? that they have in common (89:46; 90:13). Thus some lines of thought at the end of Book III carry into the beginning of Book IV.

Psalm 90 is a community’s lament asking God for divine favor (vv. 13–17), lest God’s wrath prevail over the people’s short lives (vv. 1–12). What the distress is about no one knows for sure. Whatever the distress, it affects the whole community.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

One day a man in the crowd following Jesus spoke up and said, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus then warned, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (vs. 15). Jesus explained that a certain rich man had reaped such abundant crops that he became concerned over his lack of storage space. As he thought the problem through, he came up with a solution: he would tear down his present barns and build bigger ones adequate to hold his crops. The man concluded that he would then be able to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). His perspective was entirely temporal; so God responded. God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be
required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (vs. 20). Jesus concluded by reminding His listeners that this is what happens when a person focuses only on his temporary situation and leaves God out of the equation. In the day when Moses wrote this psalm, the Israelites were wandering through desolate regions and faced numerous hostile enemies. Attack on their encampment was an ever potential threat. They needed God to protect them, and He was all they needed. Today we need to see that we too are in need of protection in perilous times; there are many out there who would harm us. God is still our Protector today if we turn to Him. He is not limited by time as we are. He is powerful and stands by us. One of the reasons that God can protect us so thoroughly is the fact that He is eternal. This attribute of God is hard for human beings to comprehend because we live within the boundaries of time. God lives in the boundless expense of eternity. As we begin our study this week, we must remember that our God is greater than we are. Because of this, He is able to take care of us.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Eternal God (Ps 90:1-2)**

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
2 Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

**Through all human generations (1)**

*Enthroned for all generations (Ps 102:12)*

12 But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations.

*God's years go beyond all generations (Ps 102:24)*

24 So I said: "Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations.

*God's dominion lasts for all generations (Dan 4:34)*

34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

*God's purposes last for all generations (Ps 33:11)*

11 But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

*God's creation lasts for all generations (Ps 72:5)*

5 He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations.

*God's righteousness lasts for all generations (Isa 51:8)*

8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations."

**From everlasting to everlasting (2)**

*God's love is everlasting (Ps 103:17)*

17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children —
God's righteousness is everlasting (Ps 119:142)
142 Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true.

God's kingdom is everlasting (Ps 145:13)
13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.
The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

God Himself is everlasting (Isa 40:28)
28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the
ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

God's dominion is everlasting (Dan 7:14)
14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every
language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his
kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Temporary Man (Ps 90:3-6)
3 You turn man to destruction, And say, "Return, O children of men."
4 For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night.
5 You carry them away like a flood; They are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up:
6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up; In the evening it is cut down and withers.

Return to dust (3)

The natural body is made of dust (Gen 3:19)
19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it
you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

God remembers that man is just dust (Ps 103:14)
14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

The dust of death (Ps 22:15)
15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay
me in the dust of death.

The return to dust (Ps 104:29)
29 When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and
return to the dust.

All came from dust (Eccl 3:20)
20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

The first man was from the dust (1 Cor 15:47)
47 The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.
Contrast with God (4)

God's thoughts and ways contrast with man's (Isa 55:8)
8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.

Man can plan, but in contrast, only God determines results (Prov 16:9)
9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

God's wisdom contrast with man's (James 3:14-17)
14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

God contrasts with man in that God never changes (Num 23:19)
19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Short life (5-6)

Man's life is but a breath (Ps 39:5)
5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.

Man's life is like a mist (James 4:14)
14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Man's life is of a few days (Job 14:1-2)
"Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. 2 He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure.

Man's life is like grass (1 Peter 1:24)
24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,

Wrath of God (Ps 90:7-10)

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger, And by Your wrath we are terrified.
8 You have set our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.
9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh.
10 The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Consumes life (7)

God's wrath is consuming because only God has the power to throw into hell (Luke 12:5)
5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.
God’s wrath is consuming because it is a dreadful thing (Heb 10:31)
31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

God’s wrath is consuming because it is like a raging fire (Heb 10:26-27)
26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

God’s wrath is consuming because there is no one who can rescue from it (Ps 50:22)
22 "Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue:

God’s wrath is consuming because no one can withstand it (Ps 76:7)
7 You alone are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?

Reveals sin (8)

Sin is revealed through the Holy Spirit who can make determinations about spiritual things (1 Cor 2:12-16)
12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Sin is revealed through the Holy Spirit's conviction (John 16:7-11)
7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Sin is revealed through the testing of the spirit (1 John 4:1)
4 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Sin is revealed through searching the word of God (Acts 17:11)
11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Brings sorrow (9-10)

Sometimes God adds sorrow to pain to bring us back to Him (Jer 45:3)
3 You said, 'Woe to me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.'"
Sometimes God brings sorrow to lead us to repentance (2 Cor 7:8-12)

8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it — I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

God brings sorrow, but also will show compassion (Lam 3:32)

32 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.

Sorrow will sometimes accompany discipline, but it is for our good (Heb 12:7-11)

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Prayer for Wisdom (Ps 90:11-12)

11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.
12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

To fear God (11)

When there is no fear of God, things do not go well (Eccl 8:12-13)

12 Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. 13 Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

Just because God does not immediately punish doesn't mean that He is not to be feared (Isa 57:11)

11 "Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to me, and have neither remembered me nor pondered this in your hearts? Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me?

All should fear God because of His power (Jer 5:22-24)

22 Should you not fear me? declares the Lord. Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it. 23 But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. 24 They do not say to themselves, ‘Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.’

All should fear God because He is Holy and Righteous (Rev 15:4)

4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."
**Those that fear God will inherit the earth (Ps 25:12-13)**

12 Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. 13 He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land.

**To number days (12)**

**God is the only One who knows man's number of days (Ps 39:4-5)**

4 "Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. 5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.

**Man's days are determined (Job 14:5)**

5 Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

**God determines man's time of life (Acts 17:26)**

26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

**Number our days because we do not know what will happen tomorrow (James 4:13-16)**

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

**Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 is a sober look at growing old and dying. The shortness of human life requires that we take seriously our relationship with the eternal God as he is known to us through Jesus the Christ and present to us in the Holy Spirit. The church I attend promotes this relationship through small groups for fellowship, Bible study, and spiritual growth. My wife and I join several other couples in a weekly meeting. In March 2007, one of our members had a seizure and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Within seven months he was gone. Bill was only 64 years old. For our group he was “young” and just at the point of enjoying years of retirement. But we were comforted by the fact that he had a great relationship with God, the Scriptures, the church, and his family. We all miss Bill. But I am confident that Bill had “numbered his days” correctly, because in his 64 years he had made time for God. Bill now has eternity with him and the certain hope of a coming resurrection. I wish my dad in his 90 years had made time for God.

**Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

One of God's attributes is what theologians call His immutability. This immutability, as defined by the New Dictionary of Theology, is that "His nature, goals, plans, and ways of acting do not change, either for the better (being perfect, He cannot become better) or for the worse. His immutability is not the changelessness of an eternally frozen pose, but the moral consistency that holds him to his own principles of action and leads him to deal differently with those who change their own behavior towards him" (Ferguson, Wright, and Packer, eds., Inter Varsity). That God is immutable is significant. This is an attribute of God that is incommunicable; that is, it is not one that we can imitate. God is love, and since we are made in His image, we too can love. We are even called to love. But as far as being unchangeable, we cannot duplicate that...
even if we try. Immutability is part of what makes God God. "Before the mountains were brought forth" could actually refer to two different events. It definitely refers to the original Creation in Genesis 1. God made all things. The fact that Jesus is also called the Creator (John 1:1-3) shows His deity. This phrase in the text could also refer to the flood of Noah's time. The earth before the Flood was very different. Some have posited that it was so different that the present mountains and valleys are not what they were during the time before Noah (cf. Ps. 104:5-8). Since the Genesis flood was universal, it had to change the topography of the earth. Water does that. If New York City were completely submerged and then drained, it is unlikely that a single building would be left standing. Christians can take great comfort in the fact that God is immutable. That means we need not fear that He will act any different even when we sin. We can count on the fact that He will chasten us if we sin. That may not sound like a good thing, but we need to remember that He is no capricious despot. He chastens His children out of love, not vengeance. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (12:7). God's immutability also provides comfort that He will punish the wicked. It is easy to think that evil men and women are getting away with their sins, but God takes note. There will come a time when He will make all things right. The judgment at the lake of fire is coming (Rev. 20:15). That judgment is not annihilation; it is eternal torment (Mark 9:47-48; Luke 16:23-24). God will have the last word. Yes, God never changes. Sometimes we think that people never change, but they do. All you have to do to realize the truth of that is go to a high school or college reunion. Hopefully, we will see people change for the better. But, as was noted earlier, God cannot change for the better. He is already completely holy.

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. Because our God is eternal, we have eternal hope (Ps. 90:1-2)
2. God's plans are assured, for they are not confined to our lifetimes or limited by our power (vs. 3-4)
3. As transitory creatures, our hope and meaning must be found in our eternal God (vs. 5-6)
4. We should be quick to confess our sins, for they can never be hidden from God (vs. 7-8)
5. We understand God only if we recognize that He is a God of righteous wrath (vs. 9-11)
6. Our brief time on earth demands that we seek God's wisdom to live rightly (vs. 12)

**Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

Probably the hardest concept for us to grasp is the eternality of God. We are surrounded by change. Our whole life experience is continuing change. We have no experience that would help us relate to the eternality portrayed for us in this psalm.

**The permanence of God (Ps. 90:1-4)**

Not only is God present, but He is also the dwelling place of His people. You may move from state to state or to another country and start to feel rather disconnected. Even when you go back to your old hometown, you may feel a lack of permanence or even continuity. The writer to the Hebrews said, "For here have we no continuing city" (Heb. 13:14). In great contrast, God and His eternal Word are forever. We are at home in Him by faith. Before He brought anything into existence, He had existed. When everything is worn out and even time is exhausted, He will still be fresh and new. Although challenged in the minds of some, He will still be God and Lord over all. You can relax and settle down in Him and dwell confidently. He will not change, and He loves you.

**The temporary nature of humans (Ps. 90:5-10)**

Even the longest human life is extremely short in the light of history. It is even shorter when compared to God's eternity. A life may be cut shorter yet by tragedy or by God's judgment. Even the best human life can seem like an old, tired joke. People seem obsessed with extending their lives. They will do anything in their power and spend any amount of money to live longer. All this is fruitless, for it does not matter how long you live but only whether you trusted in Christ. Only by faith in Him are you born again and able to partake of eternal life, to become part of God's life. There is permanence only in God.
The prayer for wisdom (Ps. 90:11-12)

The question is sometimes asked, "What would you do if you knew you had only one day to live?" You would probably set certain priorities depending on your spiritual state and your hopes. It might be most revealing to yourself and to others. The truth is that you have a very short time to live. The psalmist asked that God teach him to number his days, and that would be a good prayer for each of us. What you do with the rest of your life will demonstrate the spiritual wisdom you have learned thus far. It will also show that you continue to learn as you walk in faith and obedience with joy. You are well advised to remember God's power and anger at sin. This will keep you sober-minded. Quite apart from your past and its defeats and victories, your present and future can be rich with the blessing of God. The Lord's mercy, His glory and beauty upon you, might be seen for generations through your life from now on. The establishment of a testimony like that can be accomplished only by the Lord; He grants us faith, which is made manifest in actions that honor Him. What a legacy you could leave! Understanding that God is forever and living based on that truth could shine through to bless others. It could guide the next generation of Christians. What other course of action could have such an impact? What better way to spend your life than to invest it in demonstrating faith in God's eternity and grace? May He establish this in your life today.