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Series: Life (and Death)

Title: How Many Shopping Days Left?

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Text: [Psalm 90:1-12](#)

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[Watch Service](#)



At the end, when our story ends, when the story of this world comes to its conclusion, what matters? What will be remembered? At the end, when everything fades away, what truly matters?

Generation upon generation has asked and wondered about these questions: What matters? What will be remembered?

This is the third week of a sermon series called *Life (and Death)*. We've been looking at the tension humanity holds between these two stations, life and death. The Christian faith has a word to say about life after death, about life eternal. It also had a word to say about life *before* death, a word of hope about life here and now.

When we think about life and death, we can't help but think about time. The average life expectancy in the United States is currently somewhere around 77.28 years. For females, that number goes up to 79 years; for males it goes down to 73 years.

There is a website you can go to that will let you put in two dates, and it will give you the range between them and see how much of your earthly life allotment you have already spent. If you want, you could treat it like a big digital countdown clock, letting you know how much time you have left.

We all measure time in some form or fashion. Much of our days are run by time, on the clock. But we also keep time in ways we may or may not realize: I have 2 more days of school before Thanksgiving break. I have 3 hours before I have to pick the kids up from preschool. I will get my driver's license in 5 months. It's been 2 years since I rang the bell at my last chemo treatment. I've worked for the same company for 10 years. It's been 20 years since my father's death.

Of course, we have clocks and calendars and what not. We are constantly measuring time. At this time of year, we tend to go into a mode where we measure time by this metric: How many shopping days are left until Christmas?

We will be constantly reminded of how little time we have left to complete our necessary purchases. This season of the year is filled with an urgency because we must complete our shopping.

We, of course, aren't the first group of people to measure time or wonder how we might spend the days we have in this life. In the Psalms, we see various reflections upon the nature of life, composed long ago, even before a Jewish theology of bodily resurrection emerged.

The Psalms ask questions such as, "What are people that you are mindful of?" "Don't you have better things to do than love us?"

Some find Psalm 90 to be overly pessimistic and even a bit gloomy, but in Psalm 90 there is a great word of hope along with a plea to God to help us know what is really important:

Lord, you have been our help,
generation after generation.
Before the mountains were born,
before you birthed the earth and the inhabited world—
from forever in the past
to forever in the future, you are God.

You return people to dust,
saying, "Go back, humans,"

because in your perspective a thousand years
are like yesterday past,
like a short period during the night watch.

You sweep humans away like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning.

True, in the morning it thrives, renewed,
but come evening it withers, all dried up.

Yes, we are wasting away because of your wrath;
we are paralyzed with fear on account of your rage.

You put our sins right in front of you,
set our hidden faults in the light from your face.

Yes, all our days slip away because of your fury;
we finish up our years with a whimper.

We live at best to be seventy years old,
maybe eighty, if we're strong.
But their duration brings hard work and trouble
because they go by so quickly.
And then we fly off.

Who can comprehend the power of your anger?
The honor that is due you corresponds to your wrath.

Teach us to number our days
so we can have a wise heart. (Psalm 90:1-12)

Moses took his people to the edge of the Promised Land, and Deuteronomy 34 tells us at that edge of the promised land, he died at the age of 120. Some think Moses wrote this Psalm, but at the very least it's composed in that spirit: someone at the end of their days, wondering how we should spend our lives.

At the end, what matters? At the end, what will be remembered? And what can we do about that today, right now?

Eugene Peterson, in his Message paraphrase, says verse 12 like this: "Teach us to live well! Teach us to live wisely and well."

About ten years ago, Richard Linkletter made a fascinating movie called *Boyhood*. It was filmed across twelve years following the life of a boy named Mason Jr., played by Ellar Collettane. They followed the actor for twelve years filming from the time he was young until he went off to college. It is a fascinating movie.

We watch twelve years of life go by in about three hours. There is no plot per se; rather it has a life-is-what-happens-when-no-one-is-watching type of vibe to it. Someone who worked on the film says, "We happen upon ourselves when nothing much happens to us, and we are transformed in the process."

With no plot or action, the film is simply the succession of ordinary moments that make a life—family vacations, fights about homework, embarrassing haircuts, birthday parties, a first girlfriend, biking with your buddies, and good parents who make some bad choices while doing the best they can. As any parent of older children can attest, Mason's twelve years pass in a flash.

When Mason's family is moving out of their house to move to Houston, his mother tells him to paint over the door jamb with the pencil marks that plotted the growth of Mason and his sister Samantha.

In the uneventful days and in ordinary time, there is this search for meaning. There is a search for the sacred. What we see is that what matters isn't found by waking up in the morning and saying, "I'm going to find the sacred today."

It's found in how we spend our time.

One movie critic says this about the film, Linklater thus "captures moments in time and relinquishes them as he moves from year to year.... He isn't fighting time but embracing it in all its glorious and agonizingly fleeting beauty."

He isn't fighting time but embracing it.

Teach us to number our days, so that we might have a wise heart.

It is our fragility that makes our living so precious. We lose sight of what really matters. We spend so much time on things that don't really matter.

Our place in this world, our life, is not a status we earn, but it is a gift of grace that has been so generously given to us by God.

I love the story about Himalayan Sherpas, whose job it is to encourage, pace, and push people up places like Mount Everest. Every once in a while, they will stop and put all of their gear down and simply rest for a day or two, much to the chagrin of Westerners. The Westerners are busy thinking about how quickly they can keep climbing, and they don't want to waste a day or two. When asked, the Sherpas remind them that in their tradition, they stop and rest long enough for their souls to catch up to their bodies

I believe that a reason that time gets away from us, that we struggle to have a wise heart, to live well, is that our bodies are way ahead of our souls. How many shopping days left is not a question of the soul; it's a question of the body.

How many other questions of the soul do we spend our time ignoring? The time we have is finite and at the same time so powerful.

It's the urgency of our earthly mortality that makes our living so urgent. When we live as though we will never die, we tend to waste the life we have been given. When we recognize that life is a gift given in grace, we will give importance to the things that matter.

We will pay attention to every sacred second.

Let us pray:

*God, our prayer to you this morning is simple, yet important.
Thank you for this life, given to each of us in grace.*

*Teach us number our days,
So that we can have a wise heart,
So that we can live well,
So that we will live the lives you call us to lead.*