

“BRIEF LIFE IS HERE OUR PORTION”
NO. 3414

A SERMON
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*“LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days,
what it is; that I may know how frail I am.”*
Psalm 39:4

ACCORDING to the judgment of Calvin, and some of the ablest commentators, there is a kind of pettishness in this verse. The context appears to imply that David had grown impatient under the chastening hand of God. Job, under similar circumstances, longed to accomplish as a hireling his day, and sought the repose of the grave, and so the psalmist inquires how much longer he has to bear the ills and griefs of life, or when the goal shall be reached. But I am sure it is not for any of us to upbraid the psalmist, for what is his impatience compared with ours?

When I read of Elijah casting himself under the juniper tree, saying, “Let me die, I am no better than my fathers!”—should I wonder at the weakness of so great a man, it is only because he is great. No doubt that kind of weakness has seized us all, we have every now and then expressed a longing to depart, not so much, I fear, because of our eagerness to be with Christ, as because we have grown weary with the trials, the services, and the sufferings of this poor wilderness.

Well, if we are the subjects of the same infirmity as these godly men of old, we must flee where they fled for strength to grapple with these infirmities and overcome them. We must look to the strong for strength, and pray God to work in us that ripe fruit of patience so rare and yet so precious, for it greatly glorifies God wherever it is brought forth.

David here asks the Lord to be his teacher. Observe the words, “Make me to *know*,” that is to say, “Instruct me, let me be the scholar, and do You condescend to my ignorance and weakness, and teach me.” What, but did not David know his end? Did he not know the measure of his days? Was his frailty a secret that he could not discover? We may be sure that he knew it in part, knew it peradventure in that superficial manner in which many of us assent to moral and spiritual truths, with little understanding, and no appreciation. But he wanted to know it after a more perfect way, he would apprehend it with that spiritual enlightenment which God alone can communicate.

Upon the biscuits at the china factories you have, perhaps, seen an impression produced, the inscription is to be there in the future, that is like common knowledge. Have you afterwards seen that piece of china, when it has passed through the oven, has been baked, and comes forth with what you saw there superficially, baked into its very substance? Such should be our prayer, that what we know as upon the surface may be burned into our innermost consciences, may become indelibly a part of our own selves. Lord, not only make me to know, but make me to know by Your own divine art, burn it into me, make me to know my end and the measure of my days.

Observe the condescension of God, that we are allowed to ask Him to teach us such a lesson as our frailty. And mark the proof of our own ignorance, and our own forgetfulness, that we cannot even learn this lesson unless God does teach us. And must He make us know? We need that our minds should be renewed, as it were, by a creative or a regenerating process, else we shall fail to discern the very simplest truths. Confessing our ignorance, let us go to God with the prayer of the psalmist, and He will answer us.

There are, then, three things which the psalmist wishes to know, *his end, the measure of his days*, and growing out of these, *a just estimate of his own frailty*. May the Lord teach us to profit while we meditate upon them!

I. “LORD, MAKE ME TO KNOW MINE END.”

Do we know this already? If you do, let your pure minds be stirred up *by way of remembrance*. The certainty of your end—try to know that by grasping the fact and letting the truth of it affect your souls. Yes, I must die, unless the Lord should come, and I should be caught up together with the saints in the air. I must reach the terminus of this mortal life as other men, on the couch of weakness and the bed of death. I must die. There is no discharge in this war. There is no possibility of your having an everlasting life here. You don’t desire it if you are Christians, neither could you have it if you did desire it, a time will come when you must depart.

Think, then, dear brethren—common places will be useful to you. Let it pass over your soul, that for you the funeral bell must toll, for you the grave be dug, for you the winding-sheet and the cerements of the tomb, for you, “earth to earth, and dust to dust, and ashes to ashes,” as sure as you are a man. Being born mortal, you must die. The Lord make you to know this! *You* must die, not another for you, you must gather up your feet into the bed, and like old Jacob, pass across the stream, the narrow stream of death.

You, though now in the prime of life, or in the gaiety of childhood, you who have escaped so many accidents, and are now ripe and mellow in the quietude of old age, the dearest friend and companion cannot be a sponsor for you. When the call shall come, your pitcher must be broken at the fountain, and your wheel at the cistern, and you, in your own proper flesh and blood, must pass away, and your disembodied spirit must stand before God. Forget not, then, the certainty, or the personality of it.

It shall be conclusive, “Make me to know mine end.” It shall not be a halt, but a *finale*, not a starting on the road, but a termination of the great journey of life, “mine end,” mine end for all things beneath the sun, the end of my sin as far as this world is concerned, and the end of my service of Almighty God, the end of all my opportunities of doing good, of my occasions of getting good, mine end, so that whatever after is done under the sun, I shall have no share nor interest in it.

The living know that they must die, but the dead know not anything, other saints walk over their graves, nations rise and fall, convulsions shake the most solid empires, all things change, but there, beneath the sod, they slumber on, their memory and their love are lost, alike “unknowing and unknown.” Certainly we shall come to an end, certainly I myself shall come to that end, and when my death comes, it will for this life and this mortal state be a veritable end which I cannot pass.

While musing on our end, the accompaniments of *our end may well excite passing reflection*. In all probability, brothers and sisters, though we know not what may come to us, our departure out of this life will be attended with the same languor and prostration we have witnessed in the case of others. We may expect the sick bed, the days of pain, and the sleepless nights which are the premonitions of decease. We may imagine for ourselves what we have so often seen among our kinsfolk and acquaintances, the family gathered in silent watchfulness, and the weeping children summoned to give the parting kiss, while the hot tears fall on the blanched cheeks of the departing.

We can picture it all to our minds, it may be well we should, and make a rehearsal of it too, for it is probable enough that so it may come. We are not sure that we shall take so deliberate a leave of the world. It may happen to us in the crowded streets, our end may come to us as we go by the way. That, however, rather strikes us as the course of nature, when there is the taking down of the tent, the folding up of the canvas, the putting away of each pin and pin-hold, and so we shall be removed as a shepherd’s tent.

Then will come a leaving of all earthly things, your shutters will be put up by somebody else, your books will be no more kept by you, you will have struck the balance for the last time. Some other hand must go out to earn the children’s bread now that the father is gone. Some other woman’s tender care must watch over the little ones, now that the mother is no more. And the time must come when the rich

man shall bid farewell to his parks and lawns, when he must bid farewell to his mortgages, to his bonds, his deeds, and his estates, and the poor man, who may, perhaps, find it as hard, must bid farewell to the cottage and the hearth, and all that made life dear to him.

There will be a parting time for each of us, and we pray the Lord make us to anticipate it! In connection with this, it is probable there will be many regrets to all of us. I hope when we come to die it will be no question as to whether we are saved or not.

But even to a saved man, there arises this thought, “Oh! that I had glorified God more! Oh! that I had devoted of my substance, and of my time, and of my talents, more to my Master’s service! I can no more feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, or teach the ignorant. Oh! that those golden opportunities had been seized more eagerly, and employed more industriously by me, but now my time for service here is over, and I am mourning the scantiness of my life work, and I cannot amend that which is faulty, or supply that which is lacking.”

Our end, beloved, will be the end of all our Christian labor here below, no going to your Sunday school class anymore, no coming again of the preacher to his rostrum, no standing here to admonish or to console. No more will the corner of the street listen to your voice, my brother, in your earnest evangelizing, no longer can your hand be outstretched to distribute the Word which tells of the great Savior and the good Shepherd—our Lord Jesus Christ. On that bed you will be taking leave of all your Christian service, and if aught has been left undone, there will then be no opportunity to complete it.

Depend upon it—and it is wise to look forward to the event—our end will be no child’s play. We may often smile and sing about death, and long for evening to approach, that we may rest with God, but it is, at the same time, a most solemn thing. The best way to deal with it is to die daily, to go down to Jordan’s brink and bathe every morning in that death stream, till death shall be as familiar as life, till you shall come to think of it with daily expectation. Yet at times we almost wonder that we are lingering here, for we are expecting to be called away to dwell in the land of the living, where there is no more death, nor sorrow, nor sighing.

Then, again, it will be well for us to be made *to know our end in all its results*. Although it is called our end, yet surely it is, strictly speaking, a great beginning, a more true beginning, I was about to say, even than our first birth. The moment a man dies, he then enters upon the most solemn part of his existence. Make me, Lord, to know what it will be after this my departure, what will then happen to me?

Come, let me reflect. My soul must wing her way without the body up to the throne of God, and there at once receive the preliminary sentence, the forecast of the sentence of the last tremendous day. “Committed for trial,” to lie in durance vile without the body till the resurrection trumpet, or be admitted into glory, such as that glory can be without the body, until the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God.

Which will it be with me? Ask this, dear hearers, and ask your God to make you to know which it shall be—your spirit rejoicing in the presence of Christ your Savior, far from the world of grief and sin, with God eternally shut in, or shall it be your spirit mocking amongst kindred condemned in the pit that has no bottom, where the iron key is turned, and through the door of which there can be no escape? Which shall it be with you?

When you think of your end, remember one of these must be your portion, heaven or hell. Then comes the day of judgment and of the resurrection. The clarion, clear and shrill, shall be such as waketh man, not for battle, nor sleepers for the fray, it shall wake the long buried from their silent graves, and they shall rise from sea and land an exceedingly great multitude, then shall the great white throne be set, and the books be opened. This is the end God will have you to know.

Oh! seek to know it. When that book is opened, and Christ shall read with eyes of fire, and with a voice of thunder, what shall the Lord award you? Will He turn to the page and say, “Blotted out with My blood are all the transgressions that were once recorded here, and therefore, there is nothing now to read except that which is the award of My chosen. I was hungry, and you gave Me meat, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, sick and imprisoned, and you ministered unto Me, come you blessed,” or will it be

to see the page turned over, and to hear the voice declare, “I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink”? Will it be a record all of sin, and not of virtue, with the accompanying sentence, “Depart, ye cursed into everlasting fire”?

“Lord make me to know my end,” and let not mine end be to be banished forever with the wicked; gather not my life with sinners, nor my soul with bloody men, cast me not away from Your presence, banish me not from Your mercy, shut me not up in the lowest pit, condemn me not to eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord. “Make me to know mine end,” and let this be the end, to be with Christ where He is, to behold His glory, the glory which You gave Him from before the foundation of the world.

It seems to me that when David prayed that he might be made to know his end, he well knew these were the accompaniments, but the way in which he wished to be made to know them was that he might be made to believe in them firmly, so as to realize them vividly, look upon them not as fictions, myths, and traditions, but as realities; that he might be made to know them, so as to meditate upon them, to have his mind exercised constantly about them; that he might be made to know them so as to be prepared for them, and to set his house in order, because he must die, and not live, preparing to meet his God; and above all, that he might know his end, by having a full assurance of being saved in Christ Jesus, so that his end should be everlasting peace.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.” Oh! that we might, while mentioning such men, become such men ourselves, and know that our end shall be peace through Jesus Christ!

Now, in the second part of the prayer, David says—

II. “MAKE ME TO KNOW THE MEASURE OF MY DAYS.”

It is a very humbling thing to recollect that our days have a measure. In the Latin there is a proverb, “As poor men count their sheep,” and it is only because we are so poor in life, that we are able to measure our days. God’s days are not to be counted. “Thy generations, who can tell, or count the number of thy years? from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.”

“The measure of our days.” Ask in prayer that you may be made to know this. I will just give some outlines, like a drawing master’s sketch on the blackboard. *How insignificant the measure of my days*, what a very little time I have to live after all. If seventy years be my term, of what small account they are!

Perhaps you have stood sometimes by a sand cliff, as I did the other day, looking at alternate layers of shells, one above another. I should think at least one hundred feet thick of shells of a modern sort, succeeded by thin layers of sand. Now, this must undoubtedly have been formed by the gradual deposit of some ancient sea, but how long must it have taken to have composed a rock of one hundred feet thick of white shells and sand?

Well, but that is only a comparatively small layer of this earth. We go a little deeper, and we find sandstones and limestones, which must have taken, if the laws of nature have been at all in other times as they are now, not thousands, but even millions of years to form, by the gradual deposit of the ocean. You go deeper still, and at last you come to rocks made by fire, and the geologist is most reasonably led to the conclusion that this world, as it now stands, must have existed several millions of years, because it has taken so long a time to collect these various deposits.

I know as I stood poking my stick into this sand and shells, I felt as if I had shriveled into a little ant, and less even than a tiny animalcule which had scarcely come into this world when it was driven away, and there were these rocks looking at me, and saying, Where were you when we were formed? When the waving ocean was washing up these shells, where were you?

But now take your mind away from this world, and recollect that some beings dear to us are older than this world, for when this world was made, the morning stars sang, and shouted for joy. Oh! ye angels—what infants we must seem in comparison with your age! Where were you when Gabriel first flew upon his errand, swift as lightning? Where were you when sin made Lucifer, sun of the morning,

descend swift beneath the wrath of God into the shades of darkness which are reserved for him forever? What is your life when once compared with the period of life which cherubim and seraphim have seen?

Oh! but what are cherubim and seraphim compared with God. When, in this great world, sun, moon, and stars had not begun, God was as great and glorious as He is now, and when the whole of this creation shall be rolled up like a worn out scroll, He will be the same—no older in a myriad myriad years than He is now, for with Him there is no time—

*“He fills His own eternal Now,
And sees our ages pass.”*

All things are present to Him, we are carried away as with a flood, but He sits serene, neither age nor time change Him. “Lord, make me to know the measure of my days,” help me to fall down in my utter insignificance before Your throne, adoring Your eternal majesty—

*“Great God, how infinite are Thou,
What worthless worms are we;
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to Thee.”*

While seeking to know the measure of our days, let the great importance that attaches to them stand out distinctly before us, for *on this link our everlasting destiny is hung*. It is this life which, so far as we are concerned, decides the next. In this life a believer, then a life of glory, and happiness, and immortality, in this life an unbeliever, then in the next life, in the world to come, everlasting punishment from the hand of God.

This thought makes even this little life swell to wondrously great proportions. Here is a man next door to a worm, and yet next door to God, born but yesterday, and yet his existence will go on perpetually with God, for man shall not die. So momentous, and yet so insignificant, so magnificent, and yet so minute is the measure of my days.

“Lord, make me to know the measure of my days”—the certainty of that measure. God has appointed that you shall not die before the time, you shall certainly not live beyond it. That thread shall be cut off in its due season.

*“Plagues and death around me fly,
Till He wills, I cannot die.”*

While I admonish you to remember the certainty, let me urge you to reflect upon the uncertainty of it, as far as you are concerned. You may live other twenty, thirty, or forty years, or you may not live as many seconds, you may be spared for the next fifty years, and still taking part in life’s battle, or it may be that ere the clock has ticked again, you may be like a warrior taking his rest. Certain to God, but uncertain to you. It is well, in thinking of our days, to recollect they will be quite long enough for us if God helps us to use them well.

Life is very short, but *a great deal may be done*. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in three years, saved the world. Some of His followers in three years have been the means of saving many and many a soul. It was a short life that Luther had to do his great work in. If I remember rightly, he was hard upon fifty before he began to preach the truth at all, a hopeful sign for some of you who have wasted your young days, so there have been men of sixty that have yet achieved a life’s work before they had slept and gone their way. After all, time is long or short as you like to make it so.

One man lives a hundred years and dies a worldling, and yet another man, through God’s grace, puts forth as much energy in two or three years as if he were a thunderbolt launched from the hands of God, and he leaves his name among imperishable memorials. Your life will be long enough to achieve great things if God will help you to recollect, in measuring your days, that they will be quite short enough for

the enterprise you have in hand. You will only have finished the picture when the master palsies the arm and makes you drop the pencil, and you will only have completed the day’s work when the shadow shall have fallen and you shall go home to your rest.

Work with all your might, but don’t work despondingly, there is time enough for your soul to glorify God. Do your piece of the great work, though it be but a hair’s breadth you are suffered to perform, and though it be as nothing in the presence of Him whose mighty deeds are shown through all generations. Shall I need to say anything more about measuring our days, except that it may be a painful recollection for us to remember that, if they are not longer days, it is the prevalence of sin that made it necessary to shorten them. We might have lived to the age of Methuselah, but the Antediluvian fathers so filled the earth with violence that God sent a flood and swept them all away.

It is great mercy that men don’t live too long. Where were progress, if the old men of two hundred years ago were here to obstruct it? Where the chance for reform, if the vested interests of avarice were permitted to accumulate without any check? Now, however, the old blood is constantly superseded by fresh blood, and the stream of life is kept purer by the passing away of the old conservative element, which, when here, was exceedingly good in its season, but must give place to the influx of a spring tide more adapted to the growth of the times.

Thank God, the great infidels don’t live forever, who would have wished to have a Voltaire forever stalking about this world! What a mercy that his was but a short life! What would you think if you had a Tom Paine blustering against Almighty God five hundred years at a stretch? A mercy it is that even good men don’t live here forever, because their temptations would so accumulate in the recollection of years of service, that self-righteousness would become inveterate, hero worship an established idolatry, and dogmatism a nuisance without abatement.

I grant you experience might come in to modify some of the evils, for so the grace of God can do anything—but there would be at least a natural tendency to perpetuate corruptions. We don’t measure, I am afraid, our own years in some respects, as we are wont to do those of others. Some have to thank themselves that their lives are short, sins of their youth lie in their bones, and as we remember our days, we may provoke very painful recollections as to past sin, be checked as to all future folly, and desire henceforth to walk in holiness and fear in the service of God until our days are ended.

To number our days seems to me to mean, *“not let them run away and be wasted.”* Hours ought to be counted, we sleep too much, some of us, we spend too much time at the table, too much in idle talk. Lord, help us to measure out our days, count them as they fly, and even the odd five minutes, those little pieces of time which we think we may idle away—much may be accomplished with them if we really set our minds as in the sight of eternity to employ the scraps for God. “LORD, teach me to know the measure of my days.”

But my time has failed, and therefore, I must have but one or two words about the third point. David prays that he might know his frailty—

III. “LORD,” HE SAID, “MAKE ME TO KNOW THAT I HAVE AN END, THAT I MAY KNOW MY FRAILITY.”

I must come to that end soon. I am coming to it now. Lord, make me to know that I am so frail that I may die at any time, early morning, noon, night, midnight, cockcrow. I may die in any place, if I am in the house of sin, I may die there, if I am in the place of worship, I may die there. I may die in the street, I may die while undressing tonight. I may die in my sleep, die before I get to my work tomorrow morning. I may die in any occupation. But God, grant I may never die a blasphemer. I may die with the cup of communion at my lips, I may die preaching, I may die singing. In all, grant I may die as I wish to die, doing Your service for the love of Christ and by the power of Your Spirit.

Perhaps, as I stand here and readily speak, the arrow is on its way, soon may the hand be stretched, and dumb the mouth that lisps this faltering strain. Oh! may it never intrude upon an ill-spent hour, but find me wrapped in meditation, and hymning my great Creator, or serving my fellow man with love to

God, or in some way so laboring that it shall not come to me as a thief in the night, but shall find me watching, ready for His advent.

And this is what David meant. “Make me to know my end,” it may come at any time, but let me always be ready for it. Make me to know the measure of my days with the same object. My days are measured, these days may be few, they may be very few, I may have come to the last one.

The pilgrimage of life is a very solemn one. It reminds me of a caravan proceeding forward in a track, some know it, some of the travelers have forgotten it, but on the road which they are pursuing, there is a deep gulf or chasm, and some in the front part of the caravan have fallen into the gulf already, others are proceeding, in some cases they can hear the shrieks and cries of those who have fallen into the chasm on ahead.

But here, in the darkness, in the rear of the caravan, there may be many others indulging in such sparks of fire as they have kindled, they are sounding the tabret, and the cymbal, and making merry still, though everyone of them is going onwards towards the same precipice over which their comrades, who led the way, have already fallen. There they go, onward, onward, onward, in the darkness, till they come to that fatal step which will plunge them into the world unknown.

God has led you to this tabernacle well in health and strong, but your next step may be into eternity. Beware, then, that you lay hold on the hand which was once crucified, lest, when you slip, there be none to hold you up, and when you fall, there be none to rescue you, and you fall through the black and cheerless darkness forever and ever, lost, lost, lost, beyond hope of rescue. God forbid this for His mercy’s sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 90

“A prayer of Moses, the man of God.” It is well to know the author, because it helps you to an understanding of the psalm. Remember that Moses lived in the midst of a pilgrim people who were dwelling in tents, journeying towards Canaan. He lived in the midst of a people doomed to die in the wilderness. Only two of them, Moses himself not one of them—only two of those that came out of Egypt were to be permitted to enter into the promised land. You may expect, therefore, to find much that is somber about this psalm, and yet there is much that is very restful, trustful, about it. If it is the prayer of Moses, it is the prayer of a man of God.

Verse 1. *LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*

Your chosen people have dwelt in You. You are their rest, their refuge, their comfort, their home. It is just the same now as in the days of Moses. God’s people have no dwelling place for their souls, but their God. They are happy when they get to Him. In Him they dwell at ease.

2. *Before the mountains were brought forth,—*

Before they were born like infants, gigantic as they are.

2. *Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*

Everything else changes. You do not. We lose our comforts. We dwell, as it were, in tents which are taken down, and removed, but there is no change in You. Beloved brethren, you know this truth, but do you enjoy it? I think there is no sweeter food for the soul than the doctrine of the immutability of the eternal existence of God—God who cannot die and cannot change—that is, and always is, God. Oh! He is our confidence and joy! As for men, what are they?

3. *Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.*

He has only to speak—no need to take the scythe and mow us down. He does but say, “Return, ye children of men,” and we go back to the dust.

4. *For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.*

A thousand years is a very long period in human history. If you fly back and try, in your knowledge of history, to recollect what the world was a thousand years ago, it seems a long, long time ago, but to God, who ever lives, all the age of the world must seem but as the twinkling of an eye. What are a thousand years to You, You glorious One, before whom the past is present, and the future is as now?

5. *Thou carriest them away as with a flood;*

Men stand, as they think, firmly, but as the best built buildings are swept away by a torrent—trees, cattle, everything dispersed before the impetuous outburst—so, great God, do You carry men away as with a flood.

5-6. *They are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.*

Have you ever watched a field of grass when in full bloom? There is, perhaps, no more beautiful sight. What variety of colors in the flowers, which are the glory of the grass! And then you come by, and the mower has done his work, and there it all lies. It has been withered by the sun's heat. Just such are we. Our generations fall before the scythe of death as falls the grass. And it is done at once. “In the morning it flourisheth, in the evening it is cut down.”

7. *For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.*

Whenever God's anger breaks forth against a people, it must consume them! Oh! what a blessing it is if you and I know that His anger is turned away, and He comforts us. Then we are not troubled by it any longer. Do not apply these words to yourselves. They belong to the Israelites in the wilderness, who were dying, consumed by God's anger, and troubled by His wrath. But as for us who believe in Jesus Christ, we have love, instead of anger, and the sure mercies of David, instead of wrath, and in this we may rejoice.

8. *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.*

And what was the result of that, but that they all had to die? Their carcasses fell in the wilderness. Oh! if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this text is not true to you—does not belong to you. Here is another that belongs to you—“Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.” He has not set them in the light of His countenance, but He has cast them into the depths of the sea, and you stand acquitted, justified, beloved.

And yet there may be some here who feel their sins tonight, and know that God is looking at their sin. Do you know, dear friend, there is no hope for you but one, and that is written in the Book of Exodus, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” If you do but put your trust in the blood of Jesus Christ, God will turn away His eyes from your sins and look upon the blood of Jesus Christ. Yes, the blood of Jesus shall blot out your sins, and you shall rejoice.

9-10. *For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they are fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

It is well to have such a sense of our mortality upon us as this psalm suggests, and yet it is better still to recollect that we are immortal—that, when we die after the flesh, we shall not die, but live in Christ, world without end. Life is cut off, and it is like a string that holds a bird by the leg, we fly away. Which way? If we are God's own, we fly away above yon clouds. We reach the eternal fields where we shall sing forever and ever.

11. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.*

Dreadful is God's anger, indeed. Who knows it? None of us do. The lost in hell begin to know it, but it will need eternity for them to learn it all. Oh! I charge everyone here who is unpardoned never to attempt to learn what God's anger means. It will be an awful lesson, the power of that anger! Why, when it is let loose against a man, even in this life, in a measure it crushes him. But what the power of that anger must be, who can tell?

12. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

Count how many days have gone. Will not the time past suffice us to have wrought the will of the flesh? You cannot tell how few remain, but still, if you live to the longest period of life, taking that for granted which you may not take for granted, how little remains! Oh! that we might, by the shortness of life, be led to apply our hearts unto wisdom, so as to live wisely. And what is the best way of living wisely, but to live in Christ, and live to God?

13. *Return, O LORD, how long?*

It is an earnest prayer, full of grief. The prophet of Israel, Moses, was attending one continual funeral. Whenever the tribes halted, they formed a cemetery, and buried another legion of their dead. I do not wonder that he prays, “Return, O LORD, how long?”

13-14. *And let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

If they be but few, help us to live happily in them. Grant us the art of thy grace of knowing thyself, the source of happiness, that we may drink of bliss to the full.

15. *Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.*

Give us measure for measure—sweets in bounty, according to the bitterness. Surely God has done more than this to some of us. We can bless His name because His love has abounded, and He has made our cup to run over with His goodness.

16. *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.*

We will do the work, and the next generation shall have the glory. We will be content to wait, plodding on. Jesus will come by and by. “Let thy work appear to us, thy glory to our children.”

17. *And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us;*

That, if we must go, we may do something that will live, that we may not have lived in vain. “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us.”

17. *Yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

It is my daily prayer. My heart goes up to heaven often that the work that is done in this place may never pass away, but that God would make it such a work of true and real grace, that it may abide until the Lord Himself shall come. We may expect it if we seek it at His hands. “Yes, the work of our hands, establish thou it.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.