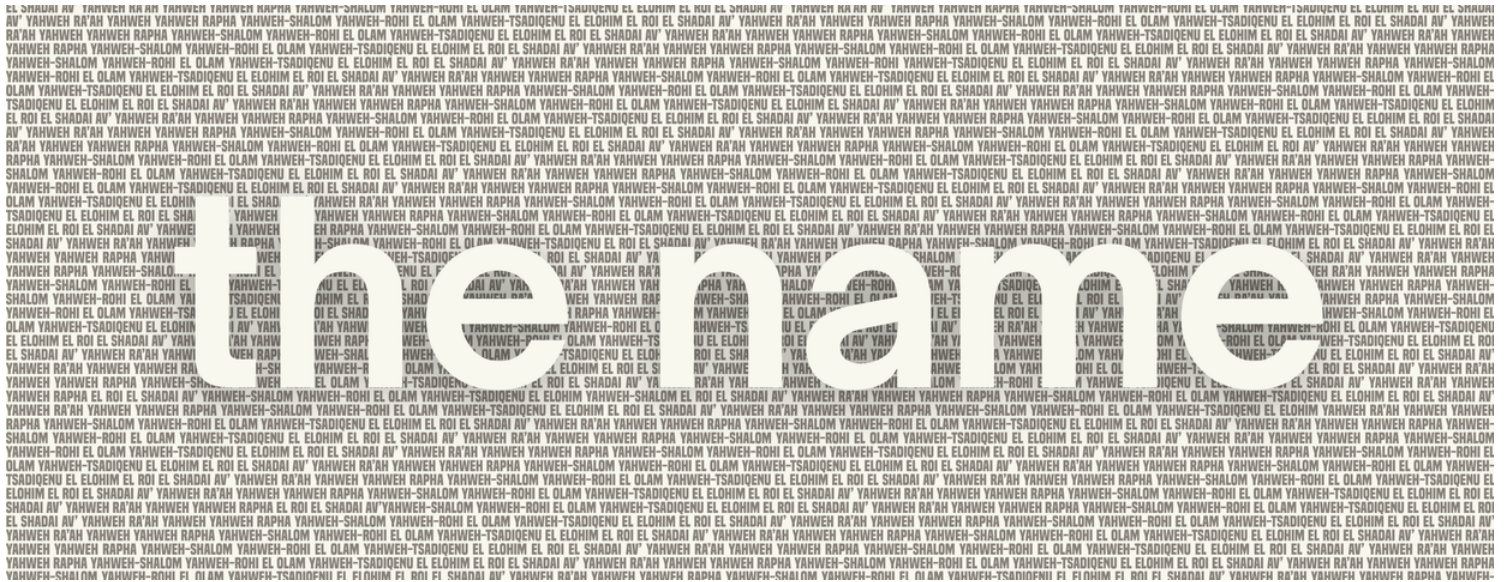




PART 11: EL OLAM – GOD EVERLASTING

By Ben Froese

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.

– Psalm 90:1-17

“Time flies.”

It’s one of the least controversial things you could possibly say in a conversation. We pretty much all feel that way.

Summer disappears before we know it. Parents often say, “They sure grow up fast!” Five years can feel like yesterday. Adult children seem to grow up in the blink of an eye.

Time moves quickly.

Psalm 90 invites us to think about how God relates to time and how we humans relate to time.

This psalm introduces us to God as “El Olam” – God Everlasting.

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Upon reading this psalm, here’s the big idea that comes through: **God is everlasting; we are not everlasting.**

I. God Is Everlasting

The Scriptures repeatedly describe God as everlasting.
“The Lord is the everlasting God.” – Isaiah 40:28

“I am the Alpha and the Omega... who is, and who was, and who is to come.” – Revelation 1:8

What does it mean for God to be El Olam?

God as “El Olam”

1. He is the Creator and Source of all life

In Psalm 90, the everlasting nature of God is highlighted especially in verse 2:

² *Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
– Psalm 90:2

There was never a moment when God was not there.
Before mountains. Before stars. Before anything else was, God was there.

Everything that begins has a cause. The Christian claim is that the everlasting God is that cause.

The image of mountains being “born” uses childbearing imagery to emphasize that God is Creator and Source of all life.

2. He is faithful to his promises

The name El Olam first appears in Genesis 21:33:

“Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.”
– Genesis 21:33

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That title is especially significant in Abraham's story. God had made enormous promises to Abraham – a son, a great nation, and blessing for all peoples – but many of those promises seemed painfully slow to unfold.

In verse 2 of today's text, that line "from everlasting to everlasting you are God"... some translations have put as "from age to age you are God." In verse 1, there's this language of God as our dwelling place "throughout all generations" (v. 1), emphasizing his faithfulness from one generation to the next.

To refer to God as El Olam doesn't only mean that he is ontologically eternal – like, a part of his very being – it means that he is enduring, he is consistent, he is faithful to his promises.

Hebrews 13:5 reminds us that he will never leave nor forsake us. He is faithful to that promise to us.

3. He sees time vastly different from how we do

⁴ *A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.*
– Psalm 90:4

God's understanding of time and our understanding of time are vastly different.

We experience life moment by moment. God sees the whole story.

² Peter echoes Psalm 90 when people wonder why Jesus has not yet returned:

⁸ *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* ⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* – 2 Peter 3:8-9

God does things on his timing, not ours. God's perspective on time is vastly different than yours and mine. And God has a good plan that he is working out in his own timing.

II. We Are Not Everlasting

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In this psalm, the everlasting nature of God is presented in stark contrast to the finitude of us human beings.

A few examples from the text:

- “You turn people back to dust” (v. 3)
- “You sweep people away in the sleep of death” (v. 5)
- We’re said to be “like the new grass of the morning” that “by evening is dry and withered.” (vv. 5-6)
- “All our days pass away under your wrath” (v. 9)
- “They quickly pass, and we fly away” (v. 10)

To simplify the big idea here: We are *not* everlasting.

Psalm 90 places God’s everlasting nature beside our human finitude. No amount of money, technology, or health routines can ultimately defeat death.

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.
- Psalm 90:10

And why is it important that we pay attention to this reality?

According to the psalm, this is all framed in the context of gaining wisdom.

III. Numbering Our Days

Central to this psalm is verse 12:

¹² Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- Psalm 90:12

Or as other translations have put the first part of this...

- “Teach us to count our days.” (NRSV)
- “Teach us how short our life is.” (GNT)
- “Teach us to realize the brevity of life.” (NLT)

To number our days is to acknowledge that the lives we’re living right now will not go on like this forever.

As we pay attention to this reality, we gain wisdom for the present!

Wisdom Says...

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1. Character matters

“What God gets out of our lives – and, indeed, what we get out of our lives – is simply the person we become.”

– Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

What matters? Growing to become the person God has made us to be!

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness and self-control.* – Galatians 5:22-23

2. The people closest to us matter most

When life is viewed through the lens of Psalm 90, priorities become clearer.

The time we spend with those God has entrusted to us matters.

Faithfulness begins close to home.

Serving others, working hard, and pursuing excellence are good things. But neglecting the people God has called us to care for is not wisdom.

We need to ask ourselves: Who am I called to care for as first priority?

3. Don't take your life too seriously

Take God seriously. But don't take yourself too seriously.

The realism of Psalm 90 sounds a little bit like the book of Ecclesiastes:

⁷ *Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do.* ⁸ *Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.* ⁹ *Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.* – Ecclesiastes 9:7

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This is not YOLO - You Only Live Once.

It is not FOMO – Fear Of Missing Out.

It is an invitation to relax a little. Receive the good things as good gifts from a good God. Enjoy the life God has given you.

God is God, you are not. Remember that.

IV. More to the Story

Later in this psalm we read:

*“Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.”*
– Psalm 90:14

Yes, number our days.

Yes, pay attention to this reality that God is everlasting and we are not everlasting.

But the last little section of this psalm seems to point ahead. It points to a hope that life does not need to end with a moan. It emphasizes that our days – maybe it’s seventy years, maybe eighty – don’t have to only be “trouble and sorrow” (v. 10).

See, one of the things that is quite underdeveloped in the psalms and most of the Old Testament is a theology related to the afterlife. It’s a bit hazy whether the psalmists have much of a hope for life to continue beyond the grave. A good future in their descendants? Yes.

This is one of those areas in theology – or Christian belief about God, the world, and reality – where progressive revelation occurs throughout the biblical story.

Later in Scripture, Jesus enters history.

The Everlasting God takes on human finitude.

Jesus says:

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²⁴Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

- John 5:24-26

We also read:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” - John 3:16

God is everlasting, we are not everlasting. And yet, in connection to the everlasting God – who is Jesus himself – we get to live forever too!

Jesus – the Alpha and the Omega – lived perfectly, died on the cross, rose again, and now offers resurrection life.

Because of Jesus, numbering our days does not end in despair.

It ends in hope.

Wisdom Says...

4. We give ourselves to that which has eternal value

Psalm 90 ends with the words:

¹⁷May 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.

- Psalm 90:17

In this, I hear a longing for the things one does, the work one does, to count for something.

Does my life matter? Does it count for something?

The answer of the gospel is “yes.” The answer of the resurrection of Jesus is “yes.”

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I love how Paul puts it at the end of 1 Corinthians 15. This is the “resurrection” chapter, where Paul talks all about the resurrection of Jesus and about all the implications that has for all of life.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. – 1 Corinthians 15:58

Your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

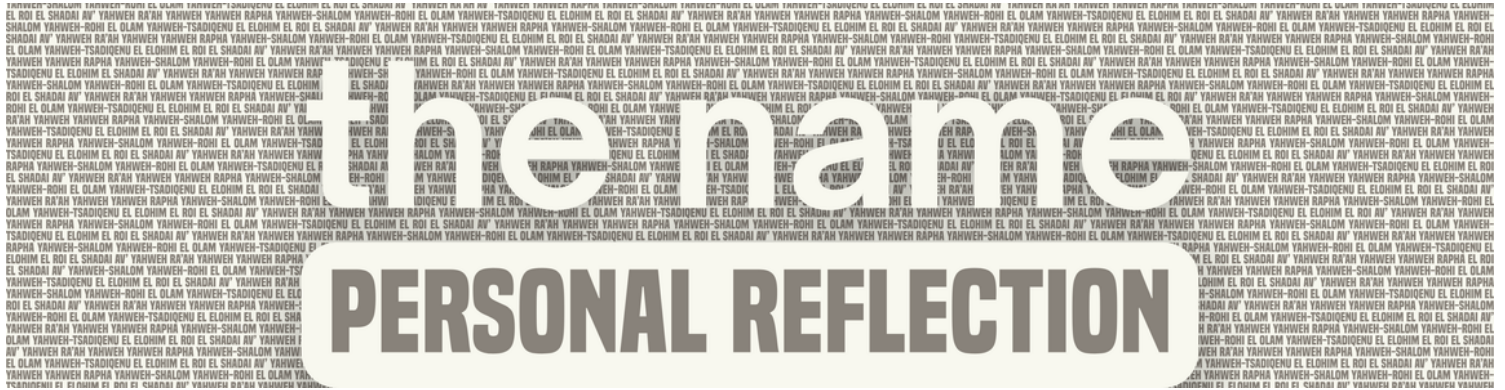
Because of Jesus' resurrection, your life matters. What you do today matters. You engaging in the work of seeking to make this world a little more like the world that is coming matters. Your work of sharing the good news of Jesus with a friend or a co-worker matters. Your work of teaching in Kids' Church matters. Caring for your family by washing the dishes, and developing a character trait of patient-love for others, that matters.

The lives we live today have an impact on eternity.

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Personal Reflection Questions

- What happens in you emotionally as you reflect on this reality that God is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2)? How does that truth reshape the way you view your own life and circumstances?
- If God sees the whole story while we experience life moment by moment, where do you find it hardest to trust His timing – and how might His eternal perspective invite you to respond differently?
- Read and reflect on **Psalm 90:12**. How often do you think about the brevity of human life? If this were something you paid more attention to, what would change? Are there things you would begin to prioritize more?
- Who are the people God has entrusted to you as first priority, and what might faithfulness to God through serving them look like in this season of life?
- Psalm 90 teaches us to number our days and emphasizes the brevity of life, while in Jesus we find the promise of eternal life. How do those two truths together shape your understanding of what it means to live wisely and hope-filled in the present?

REFLECTION