

# Psalm 90: A Prayer for Life

## Bible Study

### OUR PRAYER FOR LIFE:

Part 1: God, we marvel at your \_\_\_\_\_ nature.

Part 2: God, we tremble at your \_\_\_\_\_ nature.

Part 3: God, we lean on your \_\_\_\_\_ nature.

### INTRODUCTION:

It used to be that life issues involved the clearly-defined issues of abortion and euthanasia. As Christians we recognize that our lives are in the hands of God. We have no right to take the life of another, whether they are oblivious to the world, because they are still in the womb or because they are suffering from Alzheimer's in a nursing home. But now science is discovering the healing potential of embryonic stem cells. They've mapped DNA and hope to fix some genetic defects. They are looking at the possibilities connected with cloning – can we grow organs to replace ones that are dying? Parents go to genetic counselors to receive advice about their unborn child – will it be healthy, and if not, what are the options? What does this all mean? Where should we stand? Or is our place on the sidelines, because it has all gotten too technical and beyond us?

Let's not throw in the towel too quickly! As children of God, guided by the Spirit, we have the wonderful advantage of God's Word, which teaches us what is truly important.

For our study, we will not be discussing the beauty of life, but rather we will consider our mortality and the suffering we experience in life. Why? Maybe you can come up with an answer yourself:

**DISCUSS:** Many use 'quality of life' arguments to advocate abortion and euthanasia. How do we expose ourselves to that argument, when we promote life by talking about the 'beauty' of it?

Thankfully God has opened our eyes to the objective beauty of life. Yet aren't we also prone to despair at times? Aren't we overwhelmed by sorrow, guilt, depression and weariness at various times in our lives? If we can find hope even in our darkest moments, then we will be well armed for the spiritual battle of our lives, and the spiritual battle for the sanctity of all human life.

Before we dive into Psalm 90, let's begin with prayer:

Dear Lord, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. Bless us today as we consider the prayer of your servant Moses. As we consider our mortality and the groaning of our flesh and the world, refresh us with the thought of Your eternal mansions. Give us wisdom as we reflect on Your gift of life and how we can protect it in today's society. Apply Your Word

to our daily struggles, so that we can learn from them and teach others. Give us opportunities to share Your truths with those who are wrestling with their frailty. And in all that we do, lead us to give glory to Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Psalm 90 is the only psalm attributed to Moses, making it the oldest of the psalms (as far as we can tell). We can guess that it was written during the wilderness travels of the Israelites as they wandered about for 40 years – disciplined by God for their unbelief.

### **Part 1: MORTALITY AND IMMORTALITY:**

**Psalm 90 A prayer of Moses the man of God.**

**1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.**

**2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

**3 You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."**

**4 For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. 5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning--**

**6 though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.**

v. 1 - From the generation of Abraham to the generation of Moses, how permanent were the homes of God's adopted children?

v. 2 - How certain and permanent a 'dwelling place' is the Lord?

v. 3 - What is the #1 cause for death? disease? violence? natural disaster?

v. 4 - A watch of the night was three hours. On the timeline of eternity, how long is the line of your life? How long will its memory last?

### **Eternity:**

v. 5-6 - The "sweeping away" is the idea of a flash flood, washing man away into death. How many people have been able to stand against the flood of God's justice and not be swept away into death?

**SUMMARIZE THESE VERSES IN PART ONE OF YOUR PRAYER:** Return to the beginning and fill in your prayer. As mortals, what attribute of God do we marvel at? In your mortality, what help do you seek from God?

### **DISCUSSION**

Some scientists are trying to extend our life expectancy at any cost. Can you name some

ways in which science is willing to terminate lives to pursue longer life?  
 Their ethics show that they are not only willing to sacrifice lives, but even something more valuable. What is that? (cf. Luke 9:24)

When does the brevity of our life serve as a comfort?

## **Part 2: SUFFERING AND GOD'S JUSTICE**

**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 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength;  
 yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.  
 11 Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due  
 you. 12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

v. 7-8 - What was the sin of the Israelites that led God to make them wander about the wilderness for 40 years? (Numbers 14)

v. 9 - Was the suffering of those 40 years, a punishment for their sins?

God had said to Moses, **“I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times--not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.”** (Numbers 14:20-23)

v. 10-11 – When we suffer in life, is this a punishment for our ‘iniquities’ and ‘secret sins’ (cf. Hebrews 10:17,18)?

v. 12 – What wisdom do we gain from the discipline that God leveled on the Israelites? Read the following:

**Hebrews 12:10-12**

**Hebrews 3:15-4:2**

**SUMMARIZE THESE VERSES IN PART TWO OF YOUR PRAYER:** Return to the

beginning and fill in your prayer. As sinners, what attribute of God do we tremble at? In your mortal, sinful state, what help do you seek from God?

#### DISCUSSION

How has God used your personal moments of suffering to teach you to ‘number your days aright’ and to give you a ‘heart of wisdom’?

Name some ways in which the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment is trampled, as people attempt to avoid suffering.

### Part 3: COMPASSION AND HOPE:

**13 Relent, O 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.**

v. 13,14 – Here we see Moses demonstrating his God-imparted wisdom. He speaks to the promises of God. In prayer Luther said that we should pray to the promises of God, because then we will pray with a confident heart, because God does not lie. Listen to Moses’ prayer, when God threatened to wipe out the Israelites, “**Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared: ‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion...’ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people**” (Numbers 14:17-19).

What attributes of God does Moses turn to in prayer?

The ‘unfailing love’ of the Old Testament is synonymous with the word, *grace*, in the New Testament. What does grace mean?

v. 15 - How does our hope in Christ make this verse an understatement?

**SUMMARIZE THESE VERSES IN PART THREE OF YOUR PRAYER:** Return to the beginning and fill in your prayer. As sinners, what attribute of God do we lean on? As needy recipients of God’s grace, what help do you seek from God?

#### DISCUSSION

When people lack faith in God, how do they react to: the brevity of life?

the suffering involved in this life?

It's not the beauty of life that tempts us to make sinful choices concerning life issues. Usually it's the dark side of life and the brevity of it all, that leads us down the wrong, irrational and immoral path. When Alzheimer's runs in the family, we are more eager to condone the destruction of embryos 'for the greater good.' When we are told by our doctor that we may have a Down's syndrome child, we may convince ourselves that the child would be better off not being born. When we look at all of our flaws and inabilities, we start to daydream about how the lives of our children or grandchildren might be enhanced, if we could somehow tap into DNA coding or cloning.

If that is where temptation finds its strength, let's have compassion on those who are struggling with pain and fear. And then lovingly direct them to the source of our strength and certainty – our immortal and loving God. Let us shine the light of God's Word on these consequences of sin, so that we can gain wisdom and number our days – as to our mortality and as to the resurrection into eternity.

#### **Part 4: LASTING WORK:**

**16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.**

**17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us-- yes, establish the work of our hands.**

- v. 16 - Though Moses and his generation were denied entrance into the Promised Land, what comfort did they have and pray for?

According to the verse, what is one reason for protecting the life of the unborn?

- v. 17 - When the Israelites were originally denied entrance into the Promised Land because of their unbelief, they tried to fight their way in anyway. They were beaten back. Why didn't they succeed? (cf. Numbers 14:44,45)

Our sins have doomed all of us to a life of suffering and then death. In what way are all of the efforts of geneticists and bio-technicians doomed to failure (cf. Matthew 6:33,34)?

What work of ours has the promise of God, that He will establish it and use it to display His splendor to our children?

How does a Christian's faith in God affect his/her attitude toward life issues?

## SUMMARY

Wisdom doesn't come from clinging to this life, and wisdom doesn't come from running away from our problems. Wisdom comes from taking our mortality and our suffering seriously. It comes from taking God and His will for our lives seriously. Wisdom comes from hearing His promises and knowing that the Lord seriously applies them to our spiritual pains and needs.

## DISCUSSION

Are parents showing a lack of trust in God if they agree to prenatal test on their unborn child?

What are the potential misuses of the mapping of DNA?

Return to your prayer on the first page. Add one last petition to reflect your concerns about life issues in today's world. Finish the class with your prayer.

Alternate Prayer: Isaac Watt's Hymn "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past" (CW 441) is based on this psalm. The class can close by reading or singing the following verses (keeping in mind what we learned today).

**O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home,**

**Under the shadow of your throne Your saints have dwelt secure; Sufficient is your arm alone, And our defense is sure.**

**Time, like an ever-rolling stream, Soon bears us all away; We fly, forgotten, as a dream Dies at the op'ning day.**

**O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Still be our guard while troubles last And our eternal home!**