

Have you been counting the weeks since we started staying at home in March? I think it's 32 or 33... Maybe you're counting the days - so it's around 190...or, **maybe** you're already counting the days until Christmas - that's 61! Counting helps us keep track of our time.

Did you know Methodism's founder, John Wesley, not only counted his days, but his minutes and hours! As he traveled around preaching, he carried two diaries: a small leather volume in which he wrote, **in code - every hour** - how he spent his time; and then a larger journal where he rewrote those daily notes as paragraphs once a week. He sometimes sent them to friends, even published a few, and he kept diaries for most of his life.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley knew the importance of time - as did the author of Psalm 90. Located at the beginning of Book IV of the Psalms, this is the **only** Psalm that has the superscription, *to Moses, Man of God*. Moses, you may remember, interceded after the Golden calf incident, spending **time** with God - 40 days and 40 nights - leading to reconciliation for God's people.<sup>2</sup> This psalm seems to be an answer to the questions asked in Psalms 88 and 89 - why must God's people suffer?

Psalm 90 was written during another catastrophic time in Israel's history - when the Babylonians have destroyed Jerusalem, and the temple - and sent God's people into exile.<sup>3</sup>

It is a prayer for times of crisis, and one we can pray, too.

For many years, scholars thought Psalm 90 was actually two separate psalms - one of trust and one of lament.<sup>4</sup> Now seen as one, it compares the different relationships God and humans have with time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sgaumc.org/newsdetail/john-wesleys-diary-53194>, John Wesley's Diary, 2/26/2013, John Wesley Moments, Dave Hanson.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy DeClaisse'-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014, p. 695.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 690.

The psalm begins with reassurance that The Lord is our dwelling place, our refuge, our home, in all generations - from everlasting to everlasting, God is God. This is followed by a string of metaphors comparing God's eternity to human's brevity. A thousand years in God's sight are like yesterday, or like a *watch in the night*.

In Ancient Israel's military, there were 3 watches in the night: from sunset to about 10 p.m., from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., and then from 2 a.m. until sunrise. So, a watch in the night is a short span of time.

Which is all humans have - we are "turned back to dust, are like a dream in the night, fade and wither in the evening, and have a lifespan of only 70 or 80 years...."<sup>5</sup>

Then comes the second part of the psalm - the prayer or petition to God: The psalmist prays that we will learn to rejoice and be glad all our days and that we will not just count our days - but make them count! That God will bless all our days and help us to be a blessing to others.

How **do** we redeem our days? Western culture leads us compartmentalize our lives, but God is Lord of our **entire life** - not just an hour or so a week. Whether it's running in the morning, enjoying a cup of coffee, golfing or yoga, gardening, writing letters, working at the office, doing dishes, or working from home - our lives are redeemed when we see all our time coming under the purview of Christ.

God dwells in us and lives through us in everything we do. Whatever makes up the ordinary fabric our everyday lives...it's all through Christ. All our ordinary routines. routines ground us and give us hope... so make a plan, then do it.

We also need **resilience**. Mary Alvord, co-author of the book *Resilience Builder for Children and Adolescents* says resilience is mental flexibility - an ability to go with the flow and come up with different solutions - figuring out how we can do things in a very different way.

Mayo Clinic says resilience is being able to adapt to life's difficulties, bounce back, and make every day meaningful.

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<sup>5</sup> Rolf Jacobson, *Commentary on Psalm 90:12-17*, October 11, 2009, Workingpreacher.com

And in a CNN story, Judy Graham said older adult's lifetime experiences help them build resilience to pandemic trauma and that **most** (about 75%) are changing behaviors to minimize risks: She said they are minimizing time at stores or with family and friends, canceling plans and routine healthcare appointments, and saying no to trips

Here's 4 things that will help us **all** build resilience:

1) **Accept** that things are not the way we'd like, this may be a difficult winter and the holidays will be different for sure - so be it. It's ok to grieve the losses and to complain, but then we need to move on and find alternatives and make a new plan.

2) **Be adaptable** - Junius B. Dotson, leading the Bible Study for our Northern Illinois Annual conference a few weeks ago, likened it to a football game. He said, "we can't go online and run the same plays we did in person - we have to fight the temptation to maintain as it was and call an audible."

Let me repeat that: Dotson said, "we have to fight the temptation to maintain as it was and call an audible. The reset button has been hit and we have to **adapt**, to do things differently and use different methods."<sup>6</sup>

Be adaptable and do things differently.

Are you doing more of your shopping online?

Do you order groceries online?

Are you gathering for groups or meetings virtually?

Have you seen your doctor online,

Have you celebrated *several* birthdays via Zoom or Facetime?

In every single webinar I've attended recently, they say, "Online IS the new normal." It's OK! This is our new normal for now. And we give thanks for the technology that makes it all possible.

3) The 3rd way to build resilience is to **grow your faith**. Dotson also said it is our commitments that make us who we are and form our identity. One of my commitments is a morning time with God - right now I'm using - again - the Upper Room's "A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and other Servants." It's for anyone. There is a psalm - the same all week, and then daily scripture, a reading to reflect on, time for prayer, and hymn.

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<sup>6</sup> Junius B. Dotson, AC2020 Three-Session Bible Study based on NIC's Strategic Goals, October 1, 2020 via Zoom.

Dotson asked us this question I now ask you - What are you doing to grow your faith during this time? Here's some ideas you could try:

- read books or be part of a study group - Sunday School, *Questions God Asks Us* group, or Advent study
- read the Bible ore re-read it
- use a devotional book or online devotion like the one from Upper Room
- pray every day
- give thanks to God for all the little things that are going right
- sing or play hymns
- take an online class
- journal or draw
- make it a habit to wake up with the words of praise, "this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

And number 4 is

4) **Share God's love.** Try to make it a good day for those in your household and those you meet online or in person - with a smile, a kind word, a helping hand, or just being ready to listen to them.

This is the time we have. How are you choosing to use it? A *New York Times* article about preparing emotionally for colder weather this year, quotes psychologist Bethany Teachman, who specializes in anxiety. She says, "we're moving from sprint mode to marathon mode."<sup>7</sup>

So - Get ready for the long haul. Make a plan.  
Commit to growing your faith and becoming more resilient.

Do what you can safely, right where you are, to redeem your days.

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<sup>7</sup> Jeff Wilser, "Prepare Yourself Emotionally for Cold Weather," *The New York Times*, October 11, 2020.

Together, let us pray with the psalmist -  
Teach us, Lord, to number our days -  
not just counting them, but making the days count for something good -  
days you will bless.  
Amen.

#### PSALM 90 NRSV

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.  
<sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
<sup>3</sup> You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals."  
<sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past,  
or like a watch in the night.  
<sup>5</sup> You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
<sup>6</sup> in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.  
<sup>7</sup> For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed.  
<sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.  
<sup>9</sup> For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh.  
<sup>10</sup> The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;  
even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.  
<sup>11</sup> Who considers the power of your anger?  
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.  
<sup>12</sup> So teach us to count our days  
that we may gain a wise heart.  
<sup>13</sup> Turn, O LORD! How long?  
Have compassion on your servants!  
<sup>14</sup> Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,  
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.  
<sup>15</sup> Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,

and as many years as we have seen evil.

<sup>16</sup> Let your work be manifest to your servants,  
and your glorious power to their children.

<sup>17</sup> Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,  
and prosper for us the work of our hands—  
O prosper the work of our hands!

Pastor Becky Nicol