



Psalm 90: The Search for Significance

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In our modern society, much of life is spent at a frantic pace, an endless striving to keep up with the many demands placed upon it. From the midst of the scurry, we occasionally lift our heads and pause long enough to wonder what we are striving for, if there is lasting purpose in what we do, or if we are caught on an endless wheel. A glance at our magazines and self-help books reminds us that our worth and meaning will be found once we finally capture the elusive prize of wealth, fame, or similar significance. And off we race again. Slowly our strength ebbs, and exhausted we collapse in the dust only to realize that from dust we came and irrevocably to dust we will return. Of what use then will our accomplishments be when the memory of them has long faded? Of what purpose was our life when the spotlight has sought its next celebrity? Our hearts begin to despair at the hopelessness, meaninglessness, and futility. *“We finish our years like a sigh...their boast is only labor and sorrow; for soon it is cut off, and we fly away.”*¹

Psalm 90 clearly describes this conundrum of human life and powerfully gives a word of hope to the existence and purpose of man. Through an exploration of Psalm 90, this article will strive to give answer to the eternal question of meaning and purpose, particularly in the entrepreneurial realm of business. I invite you then to follow me on a path through time that will lead to answers for today.

In verse one of Psalm 90, God is introduced as both a refuge and the Creator. The time of God is also brought into the picture—His time is eternal, *“from everlasting to everlasting.”*² In contrast, verse three states that man will be destroyed, giving reference to inevitable death. Verse four further compares the eternal time of God to man’s temporal, fleeting time: *“For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.”* Furthermore, man himself is passing away, here and gone like a sudden flood, soon forgotten like the sleep of night. Though he flourishes in the day, by evening he is withered and gone. So is man’s time when held to the eternal standard.

¹ Psalm 90:9-10. (All references are quoted in NKJV unless otherwise noted.)

² Psalm 90:2.

Why this brevity of life? If so shallow a whisper, why is man even spoken? And if once destined for greater things as the beat within man's heart cries, why now the futility? Psalm 90 verse 7 answers "For..." The reason? God is angry with us. But why, you might ask, what have I ever done to Him? "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance."³ Every wrong done is unveiled before this eternal Creator God, and we cannot hide.

"So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom."⁴ Realization begins to dawn. In comparison to eternity, our life is but a breath. Like the grass that withers, our labor is futile and fleeting. And insignificant, temporal creatures that we are, we have sinned against the eternal God and have angered Him. Slowly with disturbing surety, our minds grasp our dire situation.

With the psalmist, our hearts cry out, "Return, O Lord! How long? And have compassion on Your servants."⁵ This is a bold plea issued out of desperation. We are literally asking God to repent and to have mercy on us. "The Hebrew verb turn/return (*shûv*)...is the verb used in the prophetic literature to call on the people to return (in repentance) to their God."⁶ "Oh, satisfy us early with your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!"⁷ We now know that in our fallen state we can do nothing but cry out for mercy. Like the psalmist, a desire remains for life to have joy, meaning and purpose.

Now in the final two verses of Psalm 90, a glimmer of hope appears. "Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands." Here the psalmist refers to a work of God, something of great glory. In poetic steps, this work and glory is related to the beauty of the Lord our God being placed upon us. No longer will the anger of God rest upon us, but rather His glorious beauty. Through an astounding transformation we take a new position as His servants, and our temporal activities are brought into agreement with His eternal work. The transitory now moves to the permanent, the fleeting breath to an impacting movement. Our work may now be established.

As Psalm 90 so effectively reveals, meaning in life will not come through that which we do, but through Him who we know. In his article entitled "Work and Meaning," Marc Kolden reminds us that, "work and other activities can be seen to be important but not of ultimate value, meaningful but also dependent on, and upheld by, the author of all meaning."⁸ This reality points to the relevance of vocation versus career.

³ Psalm 90:8.

⁴ Psalm 90:12.

⁵ Psalm 90:13.

⁶ (Urbrock 1998)

⁷ Psalm 90:14.

⁸ (Kolden 1994)

In contrast to a self-led career is the concept of vocation. Vocation is rooted in the Latin *vocare*, meaning “to call,” which “implies a relationship to the one who calls us.”⁹ A vocation is more than simply the career track we run on. Rather, it gives us the sense of calling. Roels insightfully states that “for Christians, the calling to business as a vocation is restored in Christ’s redemption.” Using Colossians 1:20 as her premise, Roels argues, “If, indeed, the calling to business is rooted in creation, then it is also delivered from sin by Christ’s victory. Once again it is possible to claim that material development and economic exchange, the daily work of so many, can be renewed.”¹⁰ At last, the hope that glimmered dimly as a futuristic reflection in Psalm 90 bursts through in full glory. It is Christ’s victory that releases us from the futility to which we were bound, and now, through obedient surrender to Christ, we find eternal significance to our existence and actions. The sense of calling in which we now live endows us with responsibility and accountability to God, encouraging excellence in all that we do in product, service, or other business aspect.

In summary, our meaning in life comes not through what we do, but through the One for whom and through whom we do it. Apart from God, we fall under His wrath and our few days are passed in futility, soon forgotten. However, through His mercy, our lives have been redeemed from the curse of sin. We have been given joy in life again. God the Creator, Lord of Heaven and Earth, establishes our work, placing His glory upon that which we do, thereby giving permanence and lasting meaning. The entrepreneurial business venture comes as a continuation and extension of the work of God. As such, the entrepreneur is responsible before God for his actions and conduct; i.e. the integrity employed toward a client or customer, or the standard of excellence for a product or service. The knowledge of calling, of vocation, means that one’s work is more than a job. It’s an integral part of life giving both meaning and fulfillment because we are doing it as unto the Lord.

*“And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hand for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands.”
Psalm 90:17*

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⁹ (Roels 2003)

¹⁰ (Roels 2003)

About the Author

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