

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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## “Mountaintop Perspective”

Psalm 90

October 12, 2003

*Dedication Day and our Tenth Anniversary*

In the ancient texts of the Psalms, there are often notes to the readers. Notes that tell us who it was for maybe... the choir director, for instance. What occasion, perhaps... a Psalm for the Sabbath or some special day... or maybe it was to be sung as they ascended into the temple. Sometimes the notes there attribute the prayer to someone.

The prayer we just heard was attributed to Moses and I was amazed at the synchronicity of things, given the significance of this day for us... the providentially appropriateness of this text on this day.

When the ancients heard it read in worship, they pictured Moses... an older Moses... tired with a really long beard... just at the tail end of his journey but still not at his destination. That illusive “Promised Land.” I’ve been thinking a lot about Moses this week.

Deuteronomy describes the scene... It’s just before he dies. He still has enough spunk to climb up Mount Nebo and from way up high God gives him just a glimpse of the Promised Land. It’s a moment of perspective. He sees.

Moses is surely thinking back on the journey. All that he and they had been through in this massive move.

All the time... the years... the miles...

All the anticipation of being in another place...

Being somewhere else.

All the longing to get there... to finally be in what they thought was God’s country.

He’s thinking about that... and from that place of perspective, perhaps utters this prayer to God. **“Lord, you’ve been our dwelling place. And it’s always been that way... even before the dawn of time and space... before creation... we have existed in you.”**

I’ve been sitting up high this week, looking out over the creek in my new office and thinking about Moses and this prayer. And about you all, in part because we have longed for so long to be here. And we love being here. We’re excited. We proud of this place we now call home.

It’s important to remember that it’s not really. That like Moses, we dwell in God... we always have. God has been our home. The gift of 10 years without a church building was that we learned that God’s presence and blessing was not dependent on drywall and bricks and lighting.

We dwell in God... we start there... and I pray that is always our confession. It makes a difference in the gospel we preach. We have good news to share with people who are hurting and who think they live a part from God. **“In God, you live and move and have your being... God is your dwelling place.”** Your joy and journey is to wake up to that, like Moses did.

The Israelites were no nearer to God after crossing into the Promised Land. You are as close to God as you'll ever be. It's a very large truth to see but it must be seen... this vastness.

Moses saw it and at another similar moment, Solomon saw it. I've also been thinking about Solomon this week. King Solomon led the people to build the temple. It took them years. Years of planning and back breaking work. Solomon would go out every afternoon and inspect the progress. The book of I Kings describes it all... All the architecture... the symbols. The various liturgical implements. It describes how they finally brought the Ark of the Covenant to rest in that inmost holy place.

Then finally dedication day came.

They had a big program, I sure... some barbeque.

Thanked the architect and the building committee.

Had a litany or two.

Solomon went through the service and after all the anticipation and all the hoopla... all the years of work... he looked around at that beautiful temple and from that place of perspective, he prayed this honest prayer. **“You can't be contained by this place, can you God? Still... folks will think this is where you live. So, when they bow in this direction and when they point their prayers this way... would you hear them from heaven.”**

It's a very large truth to see and it's important to see it from this mountaintop of a day. And when we do, like Moses and Solomon, we'll see how small we are. Even Moses felt small. Moses had moved a nation across a desert... They're on the verge of something wonderful.

And he has this moment of perspective. **“You turn us back to dust. A thousand years are like just a few hours in the night. We're like that grass that flourishes in the morning... it looks so great... but by sunset it's nothing... withered.”**

Moses felt his nothingness that day... from such a high place.

He sensed the vastness of eternity...

The saw the largeness of the mystery...

And he felt the “finger snap” of his own life.

**“I'm dust.”**

A very important prayer and confession for us to make today. We've had to be so serious about all this in recent years. In spite of our motto, this has been a complex project. We've had to “own it.” To invest in it. We've worked so hard... lots of us.

It's easy, and dangerous I think, to sink down into the hole of our “ownership.” Where things become to big of a deal. We stop seeing ourselves as dust and we see ourselves as concrete... a permanent and essential part of the foundation of a place or a thing. Being “in charge” of a building program can do that... or being on some committee, in the place of control. It's hard to see how fleeting things are, even churches.

And you can waste time in worry...

And trying to be in control of things... and fix things.

And believing this decision or that one is eternal.

Moses had seen the people wrestling with little things for so long... he had. ... All sorts of angst about things that didn't really matter. And from that high mountain at the end of it all he knew. A little bit of flourishing in the morning leads you to believe things about yourself that aren't true.

It's a good thing for all of us to hear... especially those who've done so much to build people and place. As Katy Stokes once said, **"We need to hold this lovingly and lightly."** People who've glimpse the largeness of the eternal mystery don't get upset about the color of the carpet.

Isn't it startling that Moses lets go of this venture... he doesn't lead them in. Perspective lets you do that.

You acknowledge a mystery... the mystery, in which we are contained and consequently you confess how fleeting our lives are. **"The length of our lives is 70 years... 80 if we're lucky,"** the prayer goes on. **"And our days are so hard on top of that... filled with sorrow. They pass so quickly... and we fly away... vanish."**

Some people read words like that... or face truth like that... and just say, **"Well, what the heck... it doesn't matter. Life happens then you die."**

Remember Saint Paul's words... Paul Simon's words, **"When you're weary, feeling small."** When we feel small most of us will be tempted to look at our lives and think we don't matter much. This prayer will not let you stay there. It wants you to see and us to see on this day the vastness of things so we won't take ourselves too seriously. **"Teach us to number our days."**

But... but it also wants us to keep believing that who we are and what we do, the investments we make... matter.

**"God... establish the work of our hands."** That's a good prayer to pray. It acknowledges that each of us has something to do... some work to do with our "hands." And then it leaves the outcome of that work to God.

It's a very good prayer to pray. Say... while you're parenting. **"God, I'm doing what I know to do... use what I've done in my child's life."**

You can pray this prayer when your trying to help someone... or make a difference in the community or maybe in the world. **"This is small God... but it's the work of my hands... it's what I can do. Would you establish it."**

Wise people who pray this prayer plant small oak trees, which will someday provide great shade for another generation of churchgoers. People who pray this prayer start churches in faith and trust that God will use it. They build beautiful buildings praying people will come along who'll meet God in that sacred place.

My life is so different because people prayed this prayer. I know this everyday because when I walk in my office it's a testimony to folks who offered the works of their hands to the world and to me.

There are pictures of family and friends. My grandfather and I haven't just poured a slab. My college roommate and I with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background.

There are diplomas from schools that invested in me.

Art work that blesses me. Books that inspire me.

I have an entire row of Buechner books. He doesn't know how much his words have meant to me. Or Anne Lamott... or Richard Rohr... or Saint Gregory. They just offered the works of their hands.

There's a hymn lyric... my favorite... framed. **“O love that wilt not let me go. I rest my weary soul in Thee. I give Thee back the life I owe, that in Thine ocean depths, its flow, may richer, fuller be.”**

George Mathison wrote it. He wasn't thinking of me. As I understand it, he was going through a very rough time. He saw the smallness of his own life but offered up the works of his hands anyway. **“O joy that seeketh me through pain, I cannot close me heart to Thee. I'll chase the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain that morn shall tearless be.”**

Seven families started worshipping together 10 years ago. It was in so many ways a hard beginning... such a small thing. But along the way, this gathering of worshippers has become a church. You've dedicated babies and baptized new believers. You've witnessed vows of marriage. You've said goodbye to some saints. You've ordained ministers. You've let a counselor learn how to preach over the past 8 1/2 years. You've worshipped and been a place of rest for so many.

Someone told me not long ago, that they were in an emotional, spiritual crisis and they don't know what would have happened to them if they hadn't had this place to come to on Sundays. Did any of you know that would happen 10 years ago? Or did you just trust that God would establish the work of your hands.

Psalm 90 is a good prayer for us to pray today. Some of us are very tired, we've been very busy and we've shouldered a lot for a long time... And we need to take a deep breath and remember where it is we dwell. In whom we dwell. God is our dwelling place, don't be anxious. You aren't in control... but you are in God.

Maybe some of us need to believe again that we matter. Even if our part looks small... even if we know we're dust. And trust that God will take the works of our hands and establish them in lives of people.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the prayer we offer to God today... for ourselves and for our church.  
Amen.