

ON TURNING 80

An essay by Verna Kwiatkowski

The first Bible verse that came to my mind about turning 80 was Psalm 90:10 – *“The length of our days is 70 years – or 80, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.”* This verse is NOT a promise from God that each of us should live at least 70 years, nor does it say that 80 years is all we get. My parents were both in their mid-90s when they died, and many people here at Sky View are 95 or older, including one who is 106! The author of this Psalm is Moses, who died when he was 120. I wonder how old he was when he wrote this verse? It seems to me it would have been written by someone less than 70 who thought his time on earth might end around 80. If that is true, Moses certainly was mistaken! He was 80 when he had his encounter with God at the burning bush that was NOT consumed, which started him off on the most productive 40 years in the service of God in his life!

I certainly agree with Moses that the years quickly pass. How do you feel about that? Where did my 80 years go? Moses, who was intensely connected with God, put some interesting points to ponder about Time at the beginning of Psalm 90. Listen:

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.” For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep people away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning – though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

We know that time only SEEMS to go faster for older people than for the young, due to an experience that could be called “being full of years.” Imagine, then, how time passes for God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who has experienced all the years that ever were or ever will be! No wonder Moses said that with the Lord a thousand years are like a day or even less: like a watch in the night! Isn’t it marvelous to know that, while God COULD overlook us, as no more important than grass that quickly withers, or a vapor that soon disappears, instead God treats us as if we were so very valuable, even worth dying for? On the other hand, a DAY for God can also be as a thousand years, we are told elsewhere, as he walks with each of his children through our minutes, hours, days, babyhood, childhood, our teenage years, adult-hood, middle age, and finally, old age. Over and over again God experiences Time with us. At the same time, while still on earth, we are invited to experience Eternity with God! Time and Eternity mix in strange ways. Maybe that’s another reason why Time seems to fly on some days and crawl on others!

All this brings me to another point that I have been pondering. It started recently when a friend surmised that it must have been hard for me to leave my house in 2004. I had no idea what he meant, so he clarified: “I mean to leave the memories.” Then I could shake my head, for that had not occurred to me. In the first place, my memories are inside my mind; I took them with me when we moved. In the second place, I had deliberately adopted a plan while my children were small that I thought would keep me free from

having regrets when they were grown. Obviously, it worked! Here is a summary of my plan, which I also taught to others:

1. Enjoy your children every day of their lives, no matter how old they are. If you do, you will waste no energy wishing they were younger, even babies again. My 3 sons and 2 daughters all are middle aged now, and for a long time I have enjoyed them as equals, as friends, as co-workers in the gospel, for we are all adults. Now you know why I didn't have any trouble leaving the house: my children had moved out long ago! As for my grandchildren, 2 of them are teenagers, and the other 9 are adults, and that's the way I think of them – NEVER as my babies!

2. Live in the present, facing the future, with the past behind you. Let the Lord, who is our Rear Guard, be in charge of the past, so that occasional visits there will not harm you. Most of us could say with Moses that we experienced trouble and sorrow in the past, although, hopefully, we see them mixed with joy; God did not promise us a trouble-free life! Living in the present means facing reality, accepting your age and condition as it is. It means living one day at a time, with every day being Today: *This is the day that the Lord has made*. Let's rejoice, be glad, and give thanks in it, no matter what the circumstances! Facing the future means setting your minds and hearts on things above, especially looking forward to Heaven, your home when life on earth ends. We have SO MUCH to look forward to!

If you have gathered that I don't mind being 80, you are correct! My life has been an adventure with God, and the best is yet to come! Amen.

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