

Chapter 1

You Have Less Time Than You Think

There are certain numbers we pay close attention to throughout our lives. When we're young, we count the years until we can drive, graduate, move out, get married, or start whatever version of adulthood we've imagined. Later, the numbers change. We begin counting mortgage payments, years until the children finish school, vacation days, investment returns, and eventually the years until we can retire. There is one question, however, that most of us would rather avoid: How much time do I have left?

I understand why we avoid it. Nobody wants to spend a lifetime thinking about death, and I certainly don't believe God intends for us to live in constant dread of when our lives will end. The Christian life is grounded in hope, and for followers of Jesus Christ, death does not have the final word. But there is an important distinction between fearing death and recognizing that life is finite. Recognizing that our days are limited can help us see more clearly how to live them.

Moses prayed:

“So teach us to number our days, That we may present *to You* a heart of wisdom.” — Psalm 90:12 (NASB 2020)

The older I get, the more significant this prayer becomes to me. Moses did not ask God to reveal exactly how many days he had left. He asked God to teach him to number his days, linking that awareness to a heart of wisdom. That is where I want us to begin. We cannot know how much time remains, but we can ask God to help us use the time He gives us faithfully.

When the Math Changes

At twenty-five, a decade can feel like an enormous stretch of time. At fifty-five or sixty-five, you know how quickly ten years can pass because you've seen it happen so often. Think about where you were ten years ago. Depending on your age, it may not feel like it was very long ago at all. Yet another ten years from today could bring significant changes to your life and the lives of the people you love. That realization need not make us fearful. It can make us attentive.

We tend to talk about aging primarily in terms of what we're losing. Some of those losses are undeniable. Our bodies change. Energy can change. People we love die. Opportunities that once existed may no longer be available. Pretending those realities don't exist isn't faith; it's denial. Yet these changes do not make our remaining days any less valuable. They mean we need to consider what faithfulness looks like in the life we actually have.

By now, you've likely learned that some of the things you worried about never happened, while others you never imagined did. You've survived situations you once thought would overwhelm you. If you've walked with Christ for many years, you also have a personal history of His faithfulness. Some of what you know came through success; much of it likely came through disappointment, grief, repentance, forgiveness, and difficult decisions. Those lessons cost something to learn. Numbering our days helps us recognize that the opportunity to put them to use deserves our attention now.

The Day You Cannot Get Back

Time is unlike almost every other resource God entrusts to us. If you lose money, you may be able to earn more. If a possession is destroyed, it can often be replaced. A career can sometimes be rebuilt after an unexpected loss, and even financial mistakes that took years to make can be corrected over time.

But Tuesday cannot be replaced.

Once a day has passed, no amount of money, influence, regret, or determination can bring those twenty-four hours back. We cannot save unused hours from this week and carry them into next year. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is not promised, and today is the time God has placed in our hands.

Paul also linked the use of our time to wisdom:

“So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” — Ephesians 5:15–16 (NASB 2020)

Paul calls believers to live wisely in a world marked by evil. His concern goes beyond efficient scheduling. We need to pay attention to how we live and make faithful use of the opportunities before us. Like Moses's prayer, this passage directs us toward wisdom; neither passage urges us to become obsessed with productivity.

That distinction matters. Our culture often treats a full calendar as proof of an important life. We admire those who accomplish much, build successful businesses, lead organizations, accumulate wealth, and stay constantly busy. There is nothing wrong with diligence. Hard work and caring for those entrusted to us matter. But productivity and faithfulness are not the same. A full calendar may still leave little room for what God has called us to do.

Busy Is Not the Same as Faithful

This is an area where I have had to examine my own heart. There is satisfaction in accomplishment. I like solving problems, getting things done, meeting commitments, and knowing people can depend on me. There is something good and honorable about working hard and providing for your family. The danger arises when work quietly becomes more than work. Achievement can become our identity. Being needed can become addictive. Recognition can become a measure of our worth, and approval can become something we pursue without ever admitting how badly we want it.

The world often rewards us for that behavior. A man can receive promotions even as his marriage slowly grows colder. He can provide generously for his children while giving them very little of his undivided attention. He can know hundreds of people professionally while having no one who truly knows what is happening inside him. It can even happen in our spiritual lives. We can become so busy doing things for Jesus that we spend very little time with Him.

That is why simply telling ourselves to “make the most of our time” is insufficient. Before we can decide whether we’re using our time wisely, we must define what it means to spend it well. Otherwise, we may spend the next ten years doing more of the very things that have kept us from what matters most.

The Purpose We See in Jesus

Consider the earthly ministry of Jesus. Need surrounded Him, yet the Gospels show Him giving personal attention to people others were ready to overlook. As He was leaving Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus cried out to Him. Many told him to be quiet, but Jesus stopped and called for him (Mark 10:46–52). His journey did not make that man invisible to Him.

We also read that Jesus withdrew to pray even as crowds gathered to hear Him and be healed (Luke 5:15–16). These accounts reveal a life directed by His relationship with the Father and His mission. He could attend to a person in need while withdrawing from the crowd. Both actions were expressions of His faithful obedience.

Jesus understood the urgency of His mission. Before healing a man born blind, He said:

“We must carry out the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” — John 9:4 (NASB 2020)

These words concern the Father’s work in Jesus’ ministry. We should hear them in that context before applying them to our own lives. His purpose was far greater than merely completing a list of tasks. As His followers, we can learn to take seriously the opportunities God gives us and to ask what obedience requires in each case. Sometimes that will mean continuing the work before us.

Other times it will mean stopping to listen, withdrawing to pray, or making room for someone we might otherwise hurry past.

Perhaps numbering our days will help us become clear enough to devote our remaining time to what truly matters. We will still have responsibilities, deadlines, and other needs around us that we cannot meet. But we can begin asking whom we serve and whether how we spend our time reflects our love for Jesus.

The Problem with Someday

Most of us have a list of things we intend to do someday. We may not have written it down, but we know what's on it. We intend to spend more intentional time with our spouse. We plan to call the friend or family member we've lost touch with. We'll eventually take better care of our health, become more generous, study Scripture more seriously, mentor someone younger, or begin repairing a damaged relationship. These intentions may be sincere.

The problem is that "someday" can make us feel responsible without actually requiring us to act. We tell ourselves we are going to do something, and because we mean it, we get satisfaction from deciding. Yet nothing changes. A year passes, then another, and the intention remains exactly where it was.

Someday isn't a day on the calendar.

That doesn't mean every desire should become an action right away. There are times when waiting is exactly what faithfulness requires. We may need to pray, seek wise counsel, fulfill existing responsibilities, or give someone else time and space. But there is a difference between waiting wisely and postponing what we already know we should do. We need to be honest with ourselves about which we are doing.

Their Days Are Numbered Too

We aren't the only ones living with limited time. The people we love have numbered days, too. Your wife does, if you are married. So do your children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, friends, and the people God has placed around you. We often assume there will be another opportunity: another dinner, another holiday, another phone call, another chance to say what we should have said the first time. Often there is. But we cannot assume there always will be.

I don't want us to live with fear hanging over every relationship. That could rob us of the very joy those relationships bring. But recognizing that our opportunities with people are limited should help us be more present while they last. Some arguments may not be worth winning. Some offenses may

not be worth holding for another five years. There may be words of encouragement we have thought many times but never spoken, or an apology we owe that we keep rehearsing without ever offering.

The older I get, the less interested I am in winning certain arguments and the more I am interested in loving people well. Jesus told His disciples:

“By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.” —
John 13:35 (NASB 2020)

Their love for one another would bear witness to whom they belong. That raises a searching question about how we spend time with fellow believers: Do they experience Christ’s love through us? As we consider the people God places in our lives, we should also ask whether we are loving and serving them well. Did we listen? Did we encourage? Did we forgive? Did our presence make it easier for someone else to see the character of Jesus?

Accomplishment matters. Responsibility and hard work matter. But questions about love also belong in our examination of a well-lived day. They may reveal something about our faithfulness that a completed list of tasks cannot.

Numbering Our Days Without Worshiping Ourselves

There is a danger in everything I’ve written so far, and I want to address it directly. The realization that life is short can become another invitation to make life entirely about ourselves. We can hear that our time is limited and immediately start listing everything we want to experience before we die. We need to travel more, buy the car, see the country, or accomplish something impressive before the opportunity passes.

There is nothing inherently wrong with experiences or enjoyment. We can receive God’s gifts with gratitude. But the Christian response to limited time must go beyond trying to get everything we want before it’s too late. Jesus’ faithfulness to His Father and His self-giving love call us back to the order that governs this book:

Jesus > Others > Self

Jesus comes first. Other people matter deeply. Self does not disappear, but it does not sit on the throne. Numbering our days should help us recognize what God has entrusted to us and ask how to care for it faithfully. We can enjoy the life He gives us while offering our time, attention, and abilities in love for Him and for the people He places before us.

A Planning Horizon

I want you to do something practical before we finish this chapter. We're going to set a planning horizon: a period that helps you think concretely about the future. It is an aid to reflection, not a prediction of how long you will live. The number gives you a starting point and offers no guarantees about tomorrow.

Start with your current age, then choose a future age to consider your responsibilities and hopes. Suppose you're sixty and choose eighty-five. That gives you a twenty-five-year planning horizon. Now consider that same period in terms of people. A grandchild who is eight today would be thirty-three at its end. If you visited an adult child four times a year throughout that period, that would total one hundred visits. The arithmetic is simple, but the perspective is different. Time that seemed abundant begins to look like specific opportunities to be present.

You may find a shorter period more useful. If you are already beyond the ages in that example, or if illness, caregiving, or uncertainty makes a distant date unhelpful, choose the next year, the next five years, or even the next few months. You do not need to imagine ten healthy years to participate in this exercise. Faithfulness belongs in the circumstances you have now, including days when you need rest or when you receive care from others.

Write your answers in a notebook or document you will keep for your Remaining Years Plan. Use the heading **My Time Horizon**. If you choose a future age, subtract your current age to determine the number of years. If you choose a shorter period directly, record that period instead.

My current age: _____

My chosen future age, if useful: _____

My planning horizon: _____ years or months

Take time with the following questions. Don't rush to answer them. Pray over them, consider your responsibilities and capacity, and write enough to explain why each answer matters.

1. As I reflect on this period of my life, what deserves more of my attention, given my limited time?
2. What has been receiving more time, worry, or energy than it deserves?
3. Who needs more of my presence, encouragement, or practical help? Name the people rather than writing only "family" or "friends."
4. What have I been putting off that I already know I should do? What would a faithful start look like in my current circumstances?

5. What have I learned that I could share with others? What would I want the people closest to me to know about Jesus and His faithfulness in my life?

6. As I look at these answers, how does **Jesus > Others > Self** shape what I should spend my time on?

These answers mark the start of your Remaining Years Plan. You will return to them as we examine the specific areas of life God has entrusted to you. For now, let them help you identify what deserves attention rather than serve as a checklist of everything you must accomplish.

What About the Years Already Gone?

Looking ahead often makes us reconsider the years behind us. Perhaps you weren't as present in your marriage as you wish you had been. Maybe work drained your energy while your family got whatever was left. Fear, anger, addiction, ambition, pride, or the need for approval may have consumed time you desperately wish you had back. Perhaps you knew about Jesus for years without truly following Him.

If numbering your days amounts only to tallying your failures, you've missed the point. Peter could not undo his denial of Jesus, but the risen Lord called him to care for His sheep and follow Him (John 21:15–19). Paul could not erase his past as a persecutor, yet he testified to the mercy he had received (1 Timothy 1:12–16). The criminal who turned to Jesus on the cross had no years left to repair his past, yet Jesus promised him a place with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:39–43). Grace met each of them where they were.

A book about faithfully stewarding our remaining years could easily become another source of guilt. We could look back, tally everything we should have done differently, and spend the rest of the book trying to make up for the past. That is not the gospel, and it is not what we're going to do. You cannot return to yesterday to change it. But you can turn to Jesus here, confess what needs confessing, and receive the grace you cannot earn.

That grace does not make past wrongs unimportant or erase every consequence. It frees us to face them honestly and to begin responding faithfully today. We will address regret more directly in the next chapter. For now, hold this: yesterday cannot be relived, but by God's grace, you can be faithful with what He places before you today.

One Thing

The One Thing sections in this book will help you move from reflection to a practical response. For this chapter, choose one important thing you've been postponing. Maybe you need to call someone, make an appointment, apologize, invite a younger man to breakfast, or have a conversation you

keep putting off. Choose a step that fits your circumstances and responsibilities. You don't have to solve the entire problem today, but you can decide what the next step is and when to take it.

What I have been postponing is:

The next step I can take is:

I will take that action on _____

Put an actual date on that final line and add the action to your calendar. If someone else needs to participate, your first step may be to request a suitable time. You can take responsibility for reaching out without trying to control the other person's response.

Your Remaining Years Plan: My Time Horizon

Return to the notes you started under **My Time Horizon** and complete the first part of your plan. Summarize what you have learned in a few sentences, using the prompts below. Keep your longer reflections with this summary; together, they will help you recognize recurring priorities as we work through the book.

My planning horizon is: _____

Because my time is limited, I want to devote more attention to:

One thing I can spend less time or attention on to make room is:

The person or people I especially want to be present for are as follows:

My first action and the date I will take it are as follows:

I will review this part of my plan on: _____

Choose a review date within the next month. When you return, notice what you acted on, what you learned, and what needs to change. A missed date is a reason to begin again, not to abandon the plan. The purpose is to help you respond faithfully to God in the life He has given you, one day and one opportunity at a time.