

**“Teach Us to Count Our Days...” (Psalm 90:12)**  
**A Prayer for the New Year 2026**

By Daniel S. Schipani<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about prayer and praying. Prayers of all kinds and for all occasions. So it's especially fitting to look for a suitable prayer at the threshold of a new calendar year. We find many prayers in the Bible, especially in the Psalms. And psalm 90 comes to mind, a beautiful poem and supplication attributed to Moses, “a man of God.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>(c)</sup> 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.**

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<sup>2</sup> To the readers: Keep in mind that (a) Psalm 90 marks the beginning of Book IV (chapters 90 to 106) of the Psalms; (b) the psalm contrasts the eternity of God with the fragility and precariousness of human existence; (c) it is the only psalm attributed to Moses, interesting because of the traditional connection between Moses and the divine gift of the “Law” (Torah), which should actually be translated as teaching or instruction for the people of God within the framework of the Covenant.



<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!<sup>3</sup>

From a spirituality perspective, verse 12 is at the heart of the psalm. The following paragraphs have a brief commentary on it viewed as a three-part petitionary prayer.

**“Teach us...** We earnestly open ourselves to learning, to formation and transformation. Searching, contemplation, and receptivity are hallmarks of healthy spirituality. Becoming “poor in spirit”, as highlighted in the first Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12), is a disposition that makes it possible for us to orient and reorient our life in the light of God. Thus “teach us” indicates a necessary first movement in the spiritual journey.

**...so to count our days...** These words evoke the exhortation of Ephesians 5:15-17, “Be very careful, then, how you walk—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of the time...understand what the Lord’s will is.” There are many ways to count days according to the dominant cultures; but we’re called to daily practice discernment in order to make wise choices, not only between good and evil but also between the good and the best.

**...that we may gain a wise heart.”** Biblical references to the heart are metaphorical. The heart is thus imagined as the central place and organ of the human person. It is, therefore, another name for the *spirit*, the core of our being, what makes us human created in the image and likeness of the Divine (Genesis 1:27). Gaining a wise heart means growing in moral and spiritual intelligence in order to live well within our community, family, and society.

This psalm was meant for the community and not only for personal devotional practice. So let’s make it our own. Let it be a central commitment and resolution for the New Year. **Amen.**

<sup>3</sup> This and other quotations in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Updated Version of the Bible.

