



March 5, 2017

Psalm 39

“The Frailty and Brevity of Life”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

We’ve been given just one life to live. How will you use the time God has given you? Have you prioritized your life properly? Are you prepared to face God when you die? These are the questions raised in this psalm, and Pastor Gary’s message will help us understand the answers in his message on the frailty and brevity of life.

Historical Background

1. This psalm was written for Jeduthun, and it was to be taught to a choir.
2. Jeduthun was appointed by King David to be a worship leader.
 - a. [1 Chronicles 16:41](#) - *“With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the LORD...”*
 - b. Jeduthun is also mentioned in the subtitles of [Psalm 62](#) and [Psalm 77](#).
3. David was obviously troubled about something.
 - a. [Psalm 39:2](#) - *“... my anguish increased.”*
 - b. [Psalm 39:3](#) - *“My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned...”*
4. The “something” that caused David to feel this way was God’s discipline in his life.
 - a. [Psalm 39:10](#) - *“Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand.”*
 - b. [Psalm 39:11](#) - *“You rebuke and discipline men for their sin...”*
5. God, as a loving Father, disciplines us because he loves us.

6. [Hebrews 12:11](#) – *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*
7. It’s likely that David was frustrated because of his sin, as well as God’s discipline.
8. David did something right when he determined to refrain from saying anything in front of others that would ruin his testimony or misrepresent God.
 - a. [Psalm 39:1](#) – *“I said, ‘I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked [unbelievers] are in my presence.’ ”*
 - b. [Psalm 141:3](#) – *“Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.”*
9. Pastor Gary said: “From time to time you and I will experience frustrations in our spiritual lives... Sometimes we get angry with God. Sometimes we are frustrated with God. Sometimes we don’t understand a lot of things, and so it makes us upset. But what David [understood] was, ‘I have to take that to God, I can’t be mouthing off in front of a bunch of unbelievers because it could ruin my testimony and shame the name of God. I don’t want to bring any shame to God’s name, so I’m going to keep my frustrations to myself.’ ”
10. David wasn’t encouraging suppressing our feelings or advocating never talking about what bothers us, but that we should take everything to God privately.
11. David’s prayer to God is found in [Psalm 39:4-13](#).

The Frailty Of Life

12. [Psalm 39:4-6](#)– *“Show me, O LORD, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man’s life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro...”*
 - a. [Psalm 39:4b](#) – *“...let me know how frail I am...”* (NKJV)
13. Human life is frail and no one is guaranteed tomorrow.
14. [1 Peter 1:24](#) – *“For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall...’ ”*

15. **Psalm 90:5-6** - *“You sweep men 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.”*

The Brevity Of Life

16. David used three terms that demonstrate the brevity of life:
- a. **Psalm 39:5a** - *“a mere handbreadth”*
 - i. There are approximately ten different kinds of distance measurements, including: span - cubit - long cubit - fathom - reed - furlong - stadia - Sabbath’s day journey - a day’s journey.
 - 1. A day’s journey was the longest measurement, which would have been about 20 miles.
 - 2. A handbreadth was the shortest measurement, and this would be the length of a person’s four fingers across the palm, or about four inches.
 - b. **Psalm 39:5b** - *“life is but a breath [NKJV - vapor / KJV - vanity]”*
 - i. The Hebrew word is hevel, which means, breath or a gentle breeze.
 - ii. **James 4:14** - *“... you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”*
 - c. **Psalm 39:6a** - *“man is a mere phantom [shadow]”*
17. David understood that since life was short, he needed to get his life in order and get right with the Lord.
18. **Psalm 39:6b** - *“He hustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.”*
19. David’s observations, which were made nearly 3,000 years ago, demonstrate how relevant the Bible is to our culture today, because far too many people are consumed by the busyness of life.
20. “Though professionals everywhere complain about lacking time, the gripes are loudest in America. This makes some sense: American workers toil some of the longest hours in the industrial world. Employers are not required to offer their employees proper holidays, but even when they do, their workers rarely use the lot. The average employee takes only half of what is allotted, and 15% don’t take any holiday at all, according to a survey from Glassdoor, a consultancy. Nowhere is the value of work higher and the value of leisure lower [than in America].”¹

¹ <http://www.economist.com/news/christmas-specials/21636612-time-poverty-problem-partly-perception-and-partly-distribution-why>

21. “Americans are ‘always in a hurry.’ ” – Alexis de Tocqueville ²
22. Pastor Gary said: “The truth is, if we are honest with ourselves, we pride ourselves on how busy we are, but what is the quality of life? What impact are we making within our relationships and for the kingdom of God? What kind of balance do we have? What are our priorities? These are important questions to ask, because David [said], ‘Life is like a breath and then it’s gone.’ ”
23. [Psalm 39:7](#) – *“But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.”*
24. Pastor Gary said: “When we make the Lord first in our lives, when he becomes the priority, then he will order our steps, and everything else will translate into the proper order of our lives, with eternal values in mind. Our main concern about life should not be how long we live, but how well we live... What are we doing with the life we’ve been given? Where will you spend eternity? And, when we realize the frailty and brevity of life [that] should cause us to have a great dependence on God and a great earnestness about life, because time is short.”
25. Pastor Gary said: “Don’t get so busy making a living that you neglect to make a life.”
26. Seek forgiveness from the Lord and others!
 - a. [Psalm 39:8](#) – *“Save me from all my transgressions...”*
27. Cry out to God for help!
 - a. [Psalm 39:12a](#) – *“Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping.”*
28. Pastor Gary read *The Dash*, written by Linda Ellis ©1996.
 - a. All rights reserved – This copyrighted material may not be reproduced, reposted or distributed. Please feel free to recite it anywhere at any time. If you’d like to share it on your web site, please use a link to this page... do not copy. <http://www.linda-ellis.com/the-dash-the-dash-poem-by-linda-ellis-.html>

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.

² <http://www.economist.com/news/christmas-specials/21636612-time-poverty-problem-partly-perception-and-partly-distribution-why>

2. Read [Psalm 39](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share experiences about times when they've said things that damaged their testimony or misrepresented God.
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about frustrated or angry with God. (See #9 above)
5. What would your relationships with others be like if you were to apply [Psalm 141:3](#)?
6. Read and discuss [Psalm 39:4-6](#).
7. Spend time talking about ways we experience and understand the brevity of life. (See #16 above)
8. Read and discuss the comments Pastor Gary made concerning the busyness of life and getting our priorities in the right order. (See #22 and #24 above)
9. Read and discuss the poem, *The Dash*, written by Linda Ellis.
10. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).