



# Why Are We Afraid To Die?

By

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People die. That's a fact of life. Most people will agree they will die someday, so why fear it? We can wonder about *how* we will die and even have some concerns about whether we will suffer at the end of our life. However, why are people so afraid to die when they know they're going to die?

One reason, I think, is because people don't understand death. Another is they don't know what will happen to them after death. Fortunately, we can know and understand both.

# Fear of Dying

Events of the last couple of years have shown how afraid people are of dying. The number of people dying of disease every day are broadcast for all to see. Unless you don't watch television, listen to the radio, don't log into the Internet, don't have social media apps on your phone, don't talk with family, friends, neighbors or co-workers, you know that people are dying. That has caused so many people to become extremely fearful of getting sick and dying. Why the extremes?

Fear of dying even has its own name – Thanatophobia. That covers both the fear of dying and the dying process. People may be anxious, stressed or even have a deep dread of death. They may experience panic attacks, develop irregular heartbeats, become nauseous, and avoid getting together with other people for long periods of time. They may become very angry or very sad. They may worry constantly and express a deep sense of guilt.

Mental health professionals focus on helping people talk about their feelings and refocus their fears. While that may help some people temporarily, I think there's a better way of dealing with this fear.

## Understanding the Fear

Death is not *natural*. By that I mean it's not the way God designed us. We see God's intention for humans in Genesis 1:28 ..

*Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'*

God's purpose for human beings was to share in His dominion over the earth and everything that lived in it. So, what happened to God's purpose for people? God had just one requirement for people to keep.

*And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Genesis 2:16-17*

The first man and woman knew the requirement, but that didn't stop them from breaking God's commandment.

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. Genesis 3:6-7*

And just as God told them .. Adam and Eve died.

*So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. Genesis 5:5*

So did all of their children and their children's children. God did intervene in the case of Enoch (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5), but everyone else died until God intervened again in the life of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). Other than that, as far as we know, everyone else died.

How many people have died since Adam died? Some estimates are as high as 100 billion people. Some died in old age. Some died as infants. Some died from disease. Some died in war. Some died in accidents. Some were murdered. However people have died, they died. That is a fact of life.

As King Solomon wrote: "To everything *there is* a season, A time for every purpose under heaven A time to be born, And a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). That's life. People are born. People live. People die.

Though death is a natural outcome of being born, it is not something most people look forward to happening to them. That's understandable. We enjoy living. We enjoy our family and our friends. We enjoy sunrises and sunsets. We enjoy

work and play. We enjoy both the big things and the little things in life. As someone has said, life is for the living. Who would want that to end? But end it will. We can be sure of that.

## Appointed To Die

The author of Hebrews made an interesting statement — “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). People are appointed to die one time. What that means is every person has one life to live. Not two lives. Not three lives. Not a hundred lives. Not a thousand lives. Just one life to live. The Greek word is *apokeimai* and means “to be laid away, be laid up in store, reserved.” Our death is “laid up in store, reserved” for each of us. We will “surely die” even as God told Adam.

Something else that is “appointed” by God is a limit on how long anyone will live:

*Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass. Job 14:5*

The context of Job 14 is about the problems and frailty of human existence:

*Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue. Job 14:1-2*

God placed a limit on how long people would live after Adam and Eve disobeyed Him and began their journey toward death. We don't know the number of years, but we see that their immediate descendants lived to be less than one-thousand years old. It may be that one-thousand years was the limit God reserved for human life at that time. That was before the Flood.

That limit on life quickly shortened. Noah lived to be 950 years old. Noah's son Shem lived to be about 600 years old. Shem's sons, grandsons and great-grandsons lived to be in their 400s. The following generations lived to be in their 200s and eventually into their 100s. Abraham, who was ten generations from Noah, lived to be 175. Abraham's son Isaac lived to be 180. Isaac's son Jacob lived to be 147. Isaac's son Joseph lived to be 110. Isaac's descendant Moses lived to be 120.

This is interesting in light of something God said in Genesis 6:

*And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'* Genesis 6:3

While there is some question about whether God was revealing the new limit He would place on the life of humans after the Flood or whether it was the number of years until the Flood, we do find that the age of 120 seems to be a limit for human life for the last few thousand years. While we do have

a large number of people around the world reaching the age of 100, we rarely hear of someone reaching the age of 120.

Moses did live to be 120 and wrote this about how long people would live.

*The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*  
*Psalm 90:10*

My parents and my wife's parents all lived into their 90s, but most people die before their 90th birthday. Life expectancy in the United States is currently about 79. Life expectancy in the countries with the highest rankings is in the mid-80s. What Moses wrote about "the days of our lives" is still true some 35-hundred years later.

## Death and Judgment

There are many things that can affect our life expectancy. People who are born healthy and take care of their health often live longer than people who don't. I've had friends who died in war. Some were teenagers at the time. Would they have lived longer if they hadn't fought in a war? Possibly. I've had friends who died as police officers and firefighters in the line of duty. Would they have lived longer if they hadn't chosen that occupation? Possibly. I've had friends who have died from drug and alcohol addiction. Would they have lived longer if they been able to control their addiction? Possibly. I've had friends who died in a preventable accident. Would they have lived longer if they had prevented the accident? Possibly. I've had friends who died from diseases that can be controlled with diet and exercise. Would they have lived longer if they had eaten a better diet and exercised more? Possibly.

I'm sure you have had a similar experience. Most of us have heard of someone's death and thought they could have lived longer if only they had done something differently. However, even if they had lived a different kind of life they would eventually die.

Every person living today has two appointments: death and judgment. We will die and we will be judged. While we have no choice about whether we will die or not, we do have a choice about *how* we will be judged.

The judgment the author of Hebrews was referring to is God's judgment of every soul who is alive today, has lived in the past or will live in the future. Here's a little more of the context of Hebrews 9:27:

*For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of*

*another— He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. Hebrews 9:24-28*

Jesus Christ took our judgment on Himself. Even as it is appointed for men to die once and then be judged, Jesus Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. Not all, but many. What that means is we have a choice. We know we're going to die and none of our worry or anxiety about that will change the fact that we will die. We will die and we will face judgment, but what kind of judgment?

Jesus said this at the end of answering His disciples' question about the "end of the age" ..

*And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Matthew 25:46*

What we learn from Jesus and His apostles is that we have a choice to make, a choice about life after our death. We can choose to live our life in such a way that He will judge us and sentence us to "everlasting punishment," or we can throw ourselves on His mercy based on His being offered once "to bear the sins of many."

When did Jesus bear the sins of many? When He died on the Cross.

*... who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 1 Peter 2:24*

*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. Romans 5:6-9*

## **Peace With God**

Some people will say that two things are inevitable: death and taxes. I'd like to change that a little by saying two things are inevitable: death and judgment. While we can be ready for both, it's better not to put that off to a future time. Death is coming for us, we just don't know when. Because of that fact, it's best not to put off a decision about God's judgment.

I understand why people today are afraid of dying. They lack peace with God and with themselves. How do we gain that peace? By trusting in His gift of eternal life that comes only through His Son, Jesus Christ.

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2*

God has made a way for you to experience His peace. It comes through knowing Jesus Christ personally. We don't have peace with God because we live in a majority Christian nation or because our parents were Christians or we attend a Christian church service from time to time. We have peace with God because we have been "justified by faith."

Remember the “choice” I mentioned earlier? It’s your choice to trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Do we want to face the judgment of Almighty God and take our chances with convincing Him that we lived a good life or at least wish we had? Or do we face the Almighty God peacefully, rejoicing in the fact that Jesus paid our debt? As we observe life and study God’s Word, the choice seems clear.

*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 1 Timothy 2:5-6*

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