

“Though death is a cold subject, there is no need to cringe at the thought of reading this warm book. With *The Last Enemy*, Dr. Wittmer places a pastoral hand on our shoulders and shows us how with ‘shaky knees and sweaty palms, faith swallows hard and clings to God’s promise that we will live again.’ Here is a book that is accessible to all readers but also theologically sound. And since, until Christ returns, the death rate will be right around 100 percent, we all need to prepare for our final breath with just such a book as this. *The Last Enemy* is a book that I will regularly recommend and give away.”

Dr. Chris Brauns, author of *Unpacking Forgiveness*  
Pastor, The Red Brick Church, Stillman Valley, IL

“Need a recipe for a great book? Start with a topic of desperate relevance. We all face death. Add a writer who makes it look easy to write engaging, accessible, sophisticated theology. Who better than Mike Wittmer? The secret, though, to this recipe is the glorious truth that Christ has conquered death. This may sound strange, but as unpleasant as it may be to think about death, Wittmer’s joy in Christ makes this a fun book to read.”

James Hamilton  
Author of *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*  
Associate Professor of Biblical Theology, Southern Baptist  
Theological Seminary

“When you are young you feel bulletproof—life is long and death is a distant non-reality. And then you stand by the casket of a friend whose life was extinguished suddenly or you start getting old and can see your mortality quickly approaching on the horizon. There are reminders all around us that death is the ever-present, not-so-far-away enemy that

threatens to take all the fun out of living. Someone needs to help us understand this haunting shadow—and not with worn out platitudes! Not to my surprise, Mike Wittmer is the one whose pen flows with honest and transparent reflections on how to get the ‘exit ramp from life’ into a productive perspective. This is the book that all of us need to read so that we can look forward to the fatal moment with courage, confidence, and eager anticipation!”

Dr. Joseph M. Stowell

Author of *Eternity: Reclaiming a Passion for What Endures*

President, Cornerstone University

“Everyone who plans to die should read this honest look at our enemy. Each candid chapter is as plain and unadorned as Mike Wittmer the man can be—and he really can be that. But the logic is also strong with Mike Wittmer the theologian’s biblical understanding. And that offers courage without clichés. Plan to read it!”

Knute Larson, author of *The Great Human Race*

Pastor emeritus, The Chapel, Akron, OH

“Michael Wittmer has done a powerful service to those facing their own death with this helpful book. He replaces the shallow platitudes of pop religion with Holy Scripture’s clear teachings about life, death, and eternal life. Michael illustrates in refreshing manner why we can die and still live in Jesus Christ, death’s Conqueror. Hope and humor make this book a powerful resource for a tough time. I heartily recommend it!”

Rev. Robert Deardoff

Pastor, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church,

North Platte, NE

# THE LAST ENEMY

Preparing to Win  
the Fight of Your Life

MICHAEL E. WITTMER



DISCOVERY HOUSE

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*Feeding the Soul with the Word of God*

*The Last Enemy: Preparing to Win the Fight of Your Life*

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*For Abe and Mary Yoder,  
helper of the fatherless (Psalm 10:14).  
You graced my life before I was born;  
we are your legacy.*



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Julie, if I had to do it over again, I'd marry you. And we'd have three children, Avery, Landon, and Alayna, who love the Lord and each other. Our lives are so full this time around; imagine how much fun we'll have when Jesus returns!

PART ONE



# KNOW YOUR ENEMY





# SHOCK

What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?

Psalm 89:48

YOU ARE GOING TO DIE. Take a moment to let that sink in. You are going to *die*. One morning the sun will rise and you won't see it. Birds will greet the dawn and you won't hear them. Friends and family will gather to celebrate your life, and after you're buried they'll return to the church for ham and scalloped potatoes. Soon your job and favorite chair and spot on the team will be filled by someone else. The rest of the world may pause to remember—it will give you a moment of silence if you were rich or well known—but then it will carry on as it did before you arrived. “There is no remembrance of men of old,” observed Solomon, “and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow” (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

You are going to die. What a crushing, desperate thought. But unless you swallow hard and embrace it, you are not prepared to live.

Previous generations thought a lot about death. Plague, famine, and war will do that to people. A cough might be the

start of something worse; a sunny day might lead to a cloudless week that withers your crops. Even if all goes well, you still have to fight off those who want to steal your stuff. Medieval Christians understood the fragility of this life and the importance of the next, and their leading scholars wrote books entitled *The Art of Dying* and *Preparing for Death*. Unlike today, when people would prefer to die in their sleep or by a blow they never see coming, a medieval person considered a sudden and unexpected end to be the worst possible way to go. Death is too important to sneak up on us. We must be ready for it.

You are  
going to die.



Many of us are not prepared to die, and for two opposite reasons. First, some of us are so terrified by death that we pull the covers over our heads and try to forget about it. We know everyone dies eventually, yet we pretend it will never happen to us. We're surprised when we are struck by a distracted driver, fall off a roof, or learn that we have cancer. We momentarily sober up when our parents die and we move to the front of the line, but we tell ourselves that new drugs and medical breakthroughs will prolong our lives for several more decades. And so we turn each birthday into a dark joke, with black balloons, over-the-hill cards, and "Happy Birthday" sung in a minor key, hoping good humor will cushion the brutal fact that we are closer to the end of our lives than the beginning.

There is a second, more spiritual obstacle to preparing for death: We don't take it seriously enough. I admire those Christians who have no fear of death. They "desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23), and they honestly wouldn't mind if they died right this minute. But their sense of triumph may have come too easily. Like a fledgling author whose first novel is optioned into a

blockbuster movie, or a rookie who leads his football team to a championship on the first try, I'm not sure these giants of the faith can fully appreciate what they've done. It's not easy to write a bestseller or win the Super Bowl, and it's not easy to face death without flinching.

If death was no big deal, then there would be no reason to be a Christian. Every religion purports to solve some significant problem. Buddhism addresses the problem of suffering, which it solves by awakening its followers to the "truth" that suffering, like everything else in the world, is merely an illusion. Hinduism claims that our problem is bad karma, which we can fix by devoting ourselves to every form of deity, including ourselves. Islam says that our problem is pride, which we overcome when we submit to Allah.

And Christianity . . . what problem does our faith solve? Open your Bible in the middle and you'll find people who are wrestling with death. Job sobs that his "days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope" (7:6). Solomon laments that everyone dies, wise and fool, man and beast alike (Ecclesiastes 2:14–16; 3:18–21).

Their plaintive cry reaches a crescendo in the center of the Psalms, where the writers plead with God to save us from death. "I call to you, O Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to you. Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you?" (88:9–10). Psalm 90 is entirely about death, which Moses blames on sin: "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath . . . their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (vv. 8–10).

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Scripture wrings its hands over death in the middle to set up our great salvation in the end. The New Testament celebrates the good news that God became man “so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14–15).

Sin and death are the one-two punch that Jesus came to knock out. If you think these are nothing to worry about, there is little chance you will give your life to Jesus. If you admit these lethal blows are destroying you, then you probably already know that your only hope lies in Jesus. No other religion even attempts to solve this problem.

Jesus died and rose again to defeat the twin terrors of sin and death. Minimize them—say they are nothing to fear—and you also minimize the sacrifice of Christ that conquers them. Anyone can muddle through minor difficulties, but overcoming sin and death requires an act of God.

Minimize sin and death—say they are nothing to fear—and you also minimize the sacrifice of Christ that conquers them.



This book will explain what God did and how you may join His victory over death. If you are not yet ready to confront your mortality, you desperately need to read this book. But it is not for you. If you don't care about dying because you are longing for heaven, you could still learn a lot from this book, but it is not meant for you.

This book is for those who understand, maybe for the first time, that they are going to die. Perhaps you received a bleak diagnosis, felt a lump your doctor wants to check out, or maybe you've simply determined to face the one thing more certain than taxes. And you're scared, sickened, and dismayed by the very thought of death.

I promise not to blow sunshine your way. I won't tell you death is not so bad, that it's really just a new form of life or a graduation into glory. I will tell you that death is demonic and degrading, an evil intruder into God's world and "the last enemy" that Jesus will destroy (1 Corinthians 15:26). I will tell you what happens when you die and what you can do about it.

This honest look at death, which occupies the first half of this book, is essential for understanding the hope we have in Jesus. The second half will explore this hope—how Jesus has defeated death and how we may participate in His triumph. If you take what we will learn to heart, you will win the last battle at death and be ready to live today.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Do you think too little or too much about death? What worries you most about dying?
2. Is your culture in denial about death? If so, why does this matter? What do we lose when we ignore our inevitable end?
3. Write down the reasons why you want to follow Jesus. How many of these reasons would still be true if Jesus had not defeated death?
4. The devastation of death is intimidating. What does the size of your enemy suggest about the power of its conqueror?