

Facing Death with Hope

Living for What Lasts

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Is a life-threatening illness, a major life change, or just plain old age forcing you to face your own mortality? Is your eventual death looming like a dark cloud over your life? Are you sure of what will happen when you die? How are you dealing with your questions about death? Fear? Dread? Denial? Keeping busy?

Probably, like most of us, you'd rather not think or talk about your own death. But ignoring your death won't stop it from happening—the mortality rate is still 100%. Medical advances extend lives, but no one lives forever. In the end, doctors lose every patient. Eventually you and everyone you love will die. Every life on this earth ends in death.

But is our death really the very last sentence in our book of life? Or is there something beyond death? Christians have testified with all their hearts for centuries: “I believe in the resurrection of the dead.” What does that mean? It means that if you follow Jesus, your physical death will not be the last sentence in your book of life. Jesus' resurrection makes death the second-to-last sentence in your life. When you die, if you believe in Jesus, you will hear his final say on your life: “Well done, good and faithful servant!...Come and share your master's happiness!” (Matthew 25:21).

Perhaps you know that Jesus rose from the dead, yet when you think of your death you're still full of fear and dread. That's because just knowing the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is not enough. You must know Jesus intimately. The courage to face your death comes as you put all your faith and trust in him. This booklet is written to help you face death honestly and know Jesus intimately.

Death Is Not a Friend

When people finally muster up the courage to talk about death, they often romanticize it. They talk vaguely about release from pain, going to a "better place," and being reunited with loved ones. But the Bible never portrays death as a friend. Death is called "the last enemy." Death is the final and ultimate loss. It feels unnatural and wrong because it is unnatural and wrong. We were created by God to live forever. Death is not what God intended for his world.

Facing the Shadows of Death

You don't face death just once at the end of your life. Throughout your life you face what David, in Psalm 23, called "the shadow of death" (v. 4). A shadow brings the

looming sense that the dark is approaching. Walking through the “valley of the shadow of death” takes many different forms. Death is the ultimate loss, but many smaller losses also bring the shadow of death into your life. You have probably already faced some of these shadows:

1. *Loss of health*: Whether you are struggling with a chronic illness or a sudden catastrophic event, the losses that come with physical suffering foreshadow death.
2. *Loss of loved ones*: When death comes to those we love, we feel the shadow of death keenly. But we also experience loss when a relationship ends for any reason. When you experience betrayal in a relationship, you are getting a small, bitter taste of the alienation, isolation, and abandonment that is the ultimate experience of death.
3. *Loss of youth*: The years pile up, the hair turns white, the wrinkles form, the body starts to break down, and the memory starts to fail. It’s as though fingers of darkness are reaching out to you.
4. *Loss of independence*: As you age, you experience weakness in various forms. Old age can make you as helpless as a young child, but for children the

expectation is of gain. As you age your expectation is only of loss.

5. *Loss of usefulness*: If you live long enough, you will outlive your usefulness in the workplace and watch life go on without you.
6. *Loss of meaning*: As you get older, possessions, others' opinions, status, success, and whatever else you were striving for will lose their significance.

These losses can shadow your life at any time. Whether you are young or old, every significant suffering, loss, and evil you experience leaves the bitter taste of death in your mouth.

The Cause of Death

Why are there “shadows of death”? What brought all this sorrow and sadness into the world? What causes death?

When we talk about why someone died, we usually talk about the immediate reason that they died—accident, old age, illness, a natural disaster. But the Bible deepens our thinking about the cause of death. Paul said in his letter to the Romans that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Sin is living in God's world and acting as if we are in charge. Adam and Eve