



## *“The Last Thing We Want to Talk About”*

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When it became apparent to our family members that my father’s life was coming to an end, each of my siblings made frequent visits to the apartment where my parents lived. Father had been a gospel preacher, ministering in one church for almost three decades. He was at peace with God and those around him.

We could clearly see the slowness of dad’s movements his final week. Breathing was laborious, his heart was struggling, and it took two of us to get him to his feet and into a wheelchair. He had very little appetite and we would bring him special treats just to get him to eat. We gathered near him, just to glean some final words of wisdom.

My brother posed a question to the man who had been our spiritual standard and mentor all our lives: “are you a bit afraid of death dad?”

Father answered truthfully, framing his words carefully: “I am a bit afraid, having never been this way before. But I believe God’s promises and know I shall soon be with the Lord, which is far better!”

Death is that great foreboding valley that we all must cross through. In infancy and in childhood it is the farthest thing from our minds. Even when we witness the death of grandpa or grandma and other elderly relatives, we do not equate this with our own mortality.

However, most of us do get a chance to see the shadow of death pass over and over in our lifetime. The longer we toil on this earth the more we see and the closer the time of death comes our way. Friends, co-workers, relatives, the famous and the infamous all exit that way. Some die suddenly, without warning and for some death is slow, painful and tedious. I have watched terminally ill patients bargain with God and the doctors for the latest experimental drug, chemicals or endless surgeries – anything to extend time on earth for weeks, months, or possibly years.

Jack London reflected on the strangeness of this human trait in one of his short stories:

*“Life is a strange thing. Much have I thought of it, and pondered long, yet the strangeness of it grows not less, but more. Why this longing for Life? It is a game no man wins. To live is to toil hard, and to suffer sore, till Old Age creeps heavily upon us and we throw down our hands on the cold ashes dead fires. It is hard to live. In pain the babe sucks his first breath, in pain the old man gasps his last, and all his days are full of trouble and sorrow; yet he goes down to the open*

*arms of Death, stumbling, falling, with head turned backward, fighting to the last. And Death is kind. It is only Life and the things of Life that hurt. Yet we love Life and hate Death. It is very strange.”*  
*(“The Grit of Women” [“Son of the Wolf”])*

It is true! We really do fear death and most clear minded folks try to avoid death at all costs. Woody Allen denied such a fear, but qualified his denial by adding: *“I just don’t want to be here when it happens!”* Look at several biblical facts on life and death:

Jesus, the Son of God needed a human birth and a human death to pay the penalty for our sins. The way of the cross was painful and hard for God’s Son (Luke 22:41-44). But it was necessary. The Good News is that He *died for our sins and arose from the grave!* (2 Cor. 15:1-5).

Our Savior conquered the grave! What does this mean? It means deliverance: *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* –Hebrews 2:14, 15. This means that two of our lifetime foes were defeated at the cross of Jesus, when he cried out: “It is finished!”, and then died. Jesus delivered us from two types of bondage:

- 1) The devil. The one who had the power of death – his strength is broken; his doom is sealed! Jesus is the first-fruits of the resurrection. Our savior is alive, and believers will be too, forever!
- 2) We are delivered from the fear of death. The reminder of death all around us need not hold us in bondage anymore. We can have eternal life and need not fear! -1 John 4:18; 2 Tim. 1:7.

And though LIFE may be difficult in many ways, we can live it under the guidance and power of JESUS our SAVIOR, who said: *“I am come that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* – John 10:10.

While we have a love for Life, because it offers opportunities to serve our Savior and share with others Christ’s saving grace (John 3:16), we need to know that our steps are (already) ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23), and we need to live in the knowledge that one day we will *“...depart and be with Christ, which is far better!”* –Philippians 1:23. Fear not “born again” believers, the worst thing that can happen to us on earth is our death – and that will be the very best thing!