

An Old Man Answers Some Questions about Life and Death

Thanks for your note,

You pointed out that C S Lewis gives three options concerning the end of life here on earth: “*desire it; fear it; or ignore it.*” I believe there is at least one more which is my own belief: “*Be content and rejoice in the fact that it will happen when God decrees; and our job is to continue the work He gives us to do at our time of life, but always “be ready” to leave as described in Matthew 24*”.

I heard two questions in your memo:

- a) How do older folks handle approaching death?
- b) How can I not fear death?

I have listed below some thoughts that may help.

a) How do older folks handle approaching death?

Our view of death seems to shift as we age. When we are young we accept that *others* will die—but it seems to be *their* problem. As we reach “middle age” and the generation in front of us passes on, we become uncomfortably aware that time will ultimately run out for us, too. We continue to stay busy, but someplace in our fifties or sixties we usually accept that we, too, will die. Now we concentrate on our “legacy” to prove our time here on earth was worthwhile. But, by age 75 or 80, death is a reality we can’t ignore as friends and families leave at an increasing rate.

As we move into retirement centers, death is a constant companion. Some recognize they come to die, others come to enjoy the last few years. But my observation is that most everyone continues their previous view of eternity absent some new insights that alters their lifelong belief system.

Those in extreme mental, physical or emotional pain, may welcome, or even hasten, the end. But most accept that the end is near and they simply wait for it to happen even if they are non-believers who think they came from nothing and will go to nothing.

The saddest at any age, for me, are those who believe in Heaven and Hell, but they are afraid they won’t make the cut because they have been “too bad” or not done enough “good works”.

b) How can I not fear death?

I believe the key is understanding what we mean by “life and death”. God made everything in this world to die: people, animals, plants, institutions—everything! The Old Testament concentrates on Death at the end of life here on earth. The New Testament concentrates on Death when we surrender and are “born again” into the Kingdom of God.

The Old Testament commends a proper burial after Death here on earth. The New Testament teaches that Believers go to sleep when our earthly bodies stop functioning. In fact, they were placed in a “cemetery” which comes from the Greek term for “sleeping”.

As Believers, you and I died when we surrendered and let “*God’s Will (and not My Will) be done*”. We died when we were “*born again*”. That is why we die to ourselves and take up our cross daily. Galatians 2:20 (NIV) says it well: “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*”

Since we have already died there is no reason to fear death!

I can understand fear. For me it was a desperate fear of giving up my will and letting Christ rule my life. I told a friend I felt as if I were going to my own execution. He explained to me, “You were. Don’t you understand, you can’t be ‘born again’ until you die to yourself.”

So my fear is now behind me. I am very content with the role God has given me. Full of gratitude that far outweighs any concerns. It is a new adventure I look forward to whenever God is ready. Attached is the short description that I placed at the end of *Time* which hopefully gives you some idea of my thinking.

It has only been in my later years that I finally began to comprehend the radical difference Jesus brought to this world through, His birth, ministry, death and resurrection as recorded in the writings we know as the New Testament.

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of God's rule. But the O T refers primarily to earthly manifestation of the God's reign through the nation of Israel, while the NT speaks of the eternal, invisible Kingdom of God. Both speak of Life. But the OT refers to the Good Life, here in this world and little about an Afterlife. By contrast the NT speaks of Eternal Life and the invisible Kingdom of God. As we die to Life in this world, we are born again into eternal life and live in an eternal Kingdom. Also, the Old Testament features the rich, famous and powerful, but there is not a single rich, famous or powerful person in the New Testament!.

When I look at the scriptures and our current lifestyle, I sadly conclude that many of us (including myself, particularly in my earlier years) have unwittingly sought the "*Good Life*" (promised in the Old Testament for this World if we obey God's Laws) and made *it* our goal for our few earthly years—rather than denying ourselves in this World and accepting the "*Eternal Life*" promised by Jesus for those who surrender and follow Him in this World and on into Forever.

As an old man, I find worldly things have become hazier and the eternal has grown clearer. I realize I am nearer than ever to leaving this earth and all it has held dear. It is sobering to approach the end of life. But when we are realistic, we know that this imperfect world as we know it will come to an end and be replaced by a "*new heaven and earth*" described in *Revelation*, the last book of the Bible.

Recently the importance of this concept moved me so deeply that I was convicted to make a plaque and place it on my bedroom wall stating:

***I am not in the Land of Life, moving toward Death.
I am in the Land of Death, moving toward Eternal Life!***

As I read and reread the Biblical accounts of Jesus' life, I realize that His constant message was never about perpetually enlarging or extending the lives of earthly institutions or nations, nor extending our temporary lives here on earth. Instead, He repeated over and over that he came to offer us Eternal Life in the Kingdom of God (Heaven)!

His followers then, (and often now) wanted Him to "fix" the Kingdom of the World and make everything right here on earth. But that wasn't Jesus' message. He did not give us an answer for perfecting the Kingdom of the World.

***Instead, He stressed emphatically that His Kingdom was not of this world
and He was offering us an "eternal alternative"—if we are willing to receive it!***

As the World grows darker and we watch the decline of our culture, our nation and many of our institutions, it makes His offer even more attractive. The clouds may grow darker, but it only makes the light of His Kingdom shine brighter.

I pray what I have written will be helpful. But remember, these are simply one man's thoughts and we all err. So, as usual, hold onto that which is good (of God)—and discard the rest.

From Grandpa With Love

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