

HOW NOT TO DIE

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How not to Die

Introduction

The study of “Sound Doctrine” is to help us escape the floods of false doctrine and embrace the sound doctrine of God’s Word. Unlearning the wrong things is a prerequisite for learning what’s right. This has been the underlying vein of the purpose of this series of studies.

“Death” is perhaps the most unpopular of subjects and hardly sermonised on. But nothing is more certain than death; and nothing is more uncertain than the time of dying! Death is the greatest fact of life. After all, life is a journey from birth to death.

“It ought to be the business of everyday to prepare for our last day!” said the Bible Commentator Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1872), the Prince of Preachers, said, “He who does not prepare for death is more than an ordinary fool; he is a mad man!”

John Newton (1725-1867) said this about the certainty of death: "We are in the land of the dying; we shall one day be in the land of the living!" Joshua put it this way: "This day I am going the way of all the earth!" (Josh 23:14a).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) pointed out, "Every man must do two things alone: he must do his own believing and his own dying." How true!

Christ bore our sins; believing that blesses us with salvation (1 Pet 2:24). He tasted death for everyone; believing that prepares us to face death with confidence (Heb 2:9c). How encouraging!

Someone humorously said, "Death is No. 1 Killer!" We must be ready to die at anytime because no one can be cocksure about his life-span. We must prepare ourselves for the day of death.

Though death is an enemy of mankind, it serves several good purposes. One of them is that it destroys the distinctions among people in the society. One of the distinctions is between the slave and the master. "The small and great are there. And servant is free from his master," is what we read in Job 3:19. Job curses the day of his birth and desires death in this chapter. Death also breaks the distinction between the wise and the foolish. Eccl 2:16, "There is no

more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever. Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool!" The distinction between the good and the bad is also broken by death. Eccl 9:2, "All things come alike to all: one event happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner. He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath." However, how we live will be judged in eternity.

Dr. Nelson Bell (1894-1973), who went as a missionary to China, and the father-in-law of Dr. Billy Graham, made a profound thought-provoking statement about life and death: "Only those who are prepared to die are really prepared to live!"

The Biblical view of death is quite different from the worldview. Unfortunately, our understanding of death is unconsciously influenced more by the worldview than the Biblical view. Hence these corrective lessons. The topic is "*How **not** to Die.*" By studying how not to die, we learn how to die the right way.

I dwell on this subject with so much of hesitation and apprehension because every other subject that I have written over the past

years have flown out of the Scriptures and my experiences in life. But having no experience of dying (!), I have to draw out truths purely from the Scriptures. Do you remember what Abraham told the rich man who landed in hell? When the rich man pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers on earth, Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; if they don't believe them, they won't be persuaded even if someone goes from the dead!" (Lk 16:27-31). He meant to say that they had the written Scriptures with them and hence there was no need for a man from the dead to go to them. Yes, friend, the Bible is sufficient for us for all the subjects, and more so for the subject of death.

HOW NOT TO DIE

1 Do not postpone repentance.

A quote for serious thought: "Do not expect to repent at the 11th hour; you may die at 10:30!"

Some quote the dying thief and postpone repentance but hardly would everyone get such an opportunity (Lk 23:39-43). The Biblical teaching is that we have no control over the day of death. "No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death" (Eccl 8:8). This remains to be an undeniable truth.

The Bible speaks of three kinds of death: Spiritual, Physical and Eternal death. God told Adam, "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" (Gen 2:16,17). What God meant here was "**spiritual**" death. Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Paul here speaks about the

disruption in the fellowship with God. This is spiritual death which has come on all mankind. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Next comes the occurrence of the **physical** death. The day on which Adam committed the first sin, he died spiritually. His physical death followed subsequently. This we know from the curse pronounced by God onto man, when He said, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). This is when the spirit and soul are separated from the body, causing physical death. This is the termination of physical life.

The third kind is the **eternal** death which is also called the "second death" in the Bible. Rev 20:13-15, "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged each according to his own works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." This is repeated in verse 8 of chapter 21. This is eternal separation from God and eternal torment in hellfire.

But if a person repents of his sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and obeys God's Word, he will escape second death. Jesus has given a glorious promise in John 8:51, "Most

assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." The names of the ones who obey God's Word get registered in the Book of Life. This is what is called, "Rebirth" (Jn 3:3). If you are simply born once, you will die twice; if you are born twice, you will die only once!

When is the good time to repent? It is "**now!**" Paul thundered to the men of Athens when he stood on Mars Hill, "Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but **now** commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30,31).

In one of his classics called Ecclesiastes, King Solomon with his practical wisdom has told us when to repent: "Remember **now** your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them" (Eccl 12:1-7). Words cannot be clearer than this. This wise man points out declining strength, failing vision, trembling hands, arthritic joints, forgetfulness, loss of hearing, loneliness and fear of increasing frailty when one crosses the phase of middle age and turns old.

Do you think you have already become old? You are younger today than what you will be

tomorrow! When an old man is saved, only his soul is redeemed. When a young man comes to Christ, not only his soul but also his life is saved!

One other reason why we must not postpone repentance is because life is short! There are very many Biblical pictures on the brevity of life—

□ Job laments, “My days are swifter than a weaver’s **shuttle** and are spent without hope” (Job 7:6).

□ A prayer of Moses says, “In the morning, they are like **grass** which grows up. In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers” (Psa 90:5b,6).

□ “Man is like a breath. His days are like a passing **shadow**,” sang David (Psa 144:4).

□ James wrote to the twelve tribes, “Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It’s even a **vapour** that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (Js 4:14).

We normally think that we will die only after we become pretty old. But it’s not really true. Sudden death is simply too common—

□ Death can be due to accidents. Lk 13:4,5 speak of the eighteen who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them. Referring to this accident,

Jesus asked, “Of those eighteen on whom the Tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?” He added, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

□ Unexpected and sudden death can also be due to natural calamities like earthquakes and floods. Jesus predicted, “There will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places” (Mt 24:7b). Not just in a few but “various” places. The Tsunami, the world experienced a few years ago, washed away millions.

□ Death can also be due to a suddenly diagnosed terminal illness, heart attack or cancer.

Wise Solomon gives us a warning against postponement of repentance. Prov 29:1, “He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.” Psalmist David writes, “God is a just Judge and He is angry with the wicked everyday. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword. He bends His bow and makes it ready” (Psa 7:11,12).

Yet, there are some folks who postpone repentance because they think there would be another chance after death. They conveniently but unwisely quote 1 Peter 3:19,20, “By whom also Christ went and preached to the spirits in

prison, who formerly were disobedient; when once the divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.” But this was an unique event when Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth after Resurrection and before Ascension. The passage says that He “preached” to the spirits in prison. The preaching could have been either on the promises of God or on His punishment. The text implies that Jesus justified to the disobedient spirits why they were destroyed in the flood. Their destruction was right in God’s sight. The clear and undeniable teaching of the Bible is that, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27).

When the rich man pleaded with Abraham for Lazarus to be sent to his brothers, the reply from Abraham was that the gulf between them was too “great” to allow anyone go from Heaven to Hell or Hell to Heaven, and it was “fixed” (Lk 16:26).

Beloved, repent today! We have a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun! Tomorrow may be too late! Say ‘no’ to the devil and ‘yes’ to God!

2 Corinthians 5:10 cries out a final call: “We must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ that each one may receive the things

done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Verses 20 & 21 persuade us saying, “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Do not postpone repentance any longer because our death can be anytime and our life is short. Common sense based on what the Bible says will tell us that we must repent NOW!



*Just as I am — without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am — of that free love
The breadth, length, depth and height to prove,
Here for a season, then above,
O Lamb of God, I come!*

— Charlotte Elliott, 1789-1871

2

Do not hold bitterness against anyone.

Referring to death as a fact of life, someone said, “In a world where death is, we should have no time to hate!” Just as we must not postpone repentance, we must not postpone reconciliation with men, too. Aren’t we expecting to “see” the Lord face to face at death? We are admonished in Hebrews 12:14,15, “Pursue **peace** with all people and **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord; looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many become defiled.” Though there may be many legitimate reasons why we find it difficult to make peace with certain individuals, we should go by the fact that we are going to face the Lord. This should drive us to reconcile with others at any cost.

The earthly altar in the Temple of yesterday speaks of the “spiritual” presence of God today. We will soon be ushered into the literal presence of God. Matthew 5:23-25 brings both the altar of worship and reconciliation together: “If you

bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.”

Heaven is the land of the “forgiven.” I say that because the ultimate ground on which anyone is given entry into Heaven is God’s “forgiveness.” When we are forgiven, we must not leave behind anyone unforgiven! Neither do we have the right to hold grudge against anyone when God Himself has forgiven him.

The first statement Jesus made while dying on the Cross was on forgiveness. Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Stephen radiated the same attitude. While being stoned he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin; and when he had said this he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). Note that he said this with a “loud voice,” which means he did not make a casual passing statement. St. Francis of Assisi of the 13th century made a profound statement in this context: “It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying we are born to eternal life!”

We are literally going to join the “general assembly” of all saints in Heaven. How can we ever meet anyone there with bitterness? Though relationships may not be evident there,

“remembrances” will be there. Didn’t Abraham say to the rich man, “Son, **remember** that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented” (Lk 16:25). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22,23). Yes, Heaven is a land of the justified, the forgiven. It would be a land of surprises! Those we least expected may be there. Those we thought would certainly be there may be missing! (Mt 8:11,12).

The Bible often connects our “love” for people with the “end” of our life — the end can be either death or the second coming of Christ, whichever comes earlier. Have these passages, which tie both **resurrection** and a **good conscience**, ever caught your attention? —

□ Paul testified before Governor Felix, “I have hope in God which they themselves also accept, that there will be a **resurrection** of the dead; being so, I myself strive to have a good **conscience** without offence toward God and man” (Acts 24:15,16). To the Philippian believers he wrote, “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5).

□ Apostle James wrote to the twelve tribes, “For judgment is without **mercy** to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over **judgment**” (Js 2:13). He goes further to say, “Do not **grumble** against one another, lest you be condemned. Behold, the **Judge** is standing at the door!” (5:8,9). The apostle speaks about patience and acceptance as against condemnation and complaining.

□ Apostle John also emphasized this truth: “**Love** has been perfected among us in this; that we may have boldness in the day of **judgment**; because as He is, so are we in this world” (1 Jn 4:17).

The commonest regret of most folks at the end of their lives: “I should have loved people more!”

Fights and rifts have not been uncommon among men of God; but towards the end of their lives their hearts were softened and they reconciled with those they needed to —

□ Jacob took the initiative to reconcile with Esau. “Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother” (Gen 32:3). Following this the messengers returned to Jacob saying, “We came to your brother Esau and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him” (v6). It is to be significantly noted that it

was following this initiative by Jacob, God blessed him with a heavenly vision and experience at Peniel (vv 24-32).

□ Yet another beautiful scene of reconciliation was between Joseph and his brothers. He told his brothers, “It was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen 45:8). Would we have made that statement in such a situation? Have we grown mature enough to say that? Verse 2 says, “He wept aloud and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.” Joseph was honest with his feelings and let others see through him. He was transparent with his brokenness. He had nothing to hide! Then he said, “But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (v5). There is not a tinge of anger or bitterness that we find here while Joseph was reconciling with his brothers.

This reconciliation not only saved the family of Joseph in the famine, but paved way for Jacob to utter prophetic words about the twelve tribes of Israel. This is recorded in Genesis 49. The chapter closes with the words, “And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people” (v33). How do you think the story would have ended if Joseph had acted in bitterness against his brothers?

□ The New Testament records a beautiful picture of how maturity played a major role in reconciliation. There came a rift between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark at the commencement of their second missionary journey. But Paul got softened and wrote pleasantly about them towards the end of his life. This teaches us several practical lessons. 2 Timothy 4:6, “I am already being poured as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand.” He goes on to say, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (v11). He also wrote to the saints at Colosse, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you with Mark the cousin of Barnabas about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you welcome him” (Col 4:10).

We are in the morning, noon or evening of our lives. Our hearts should become larger and larger as we grow older and older. There is a beautiful illustration in Ezekiel 41:7, “As one went up from storey to storey, the side chambers became wider all around, because their supporting ledges in the wall of the temple ascended like steps; therefore the width of the structure increased as one went up from the lowest storey to the highest by way of the middle one.” Just as the temple grew wider, so should our hearts!

Though reconciliation towards the end brings down God's blessings, the ideal is to maintain love and affection throughout—

□ David and Jonathan's longterm relationship is a classic example of friendship. Though Jonathan's father Saul literally hounded David, David and Jonathan did not allow this to come in the way of their relationship. Maintain cordial relationships though something bad happens.

□ Jesus' disciples were His friends and followers. Though their behaviour was so discouraging at various junctures, He never grew cold in His love for them. John records, "Now, before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). Growth in love should be to the extent of being ready to die for others: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 Jn 3:16). One of my missionary friends prayed like this just before I was wheeled into the operation theatre for my open-heart surgery in 1996: "Lord, take my life but spare Stanley annan."

Several physical diseases have psychological causes. Most common among them are

anger, bitterness and unforgiveness. Old age, as it is, brings with it so many ills. Why add to them? Apostle Peter quotes from Psalms, "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it" (1 Pet 3:10,11; Psa 34:12-16).

A concluding thought: The beginning and end of our life are comparable to sunrise and sunset. Let not our life end with anger and bitterness. The Bible exhorts us, "Be angry, yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph 4:26). Let's take this counsel to heart!



*Around the throne of God in Heaven
Thousands of children stand,
Children whose sins are all forgiven,
A holy, happy band,
Singing, "Glory, glory, glory!"*

*On earth they sought their Saviour's grace,
On earth they loved His name;
So now they see His blessed face,
And stand before the Lamb,
Singing, "Glory, glory, glory!"*

—Anne Shepherd, 1809-1857

3

Do not depend on your wealth.

The Bible connects riches too often with death. “We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Tim 6:7). Paul wrote this reminder to Timothy in the context of contentment.

This was Job’s testimony when he lost all his wealth: “Naked I came from mother’s womb. And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

King Solomon concluded in his wisdom, “As man came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came. And he shall take nothing from his labour, which he may carry away in his hand” (Eccl 5:15). If the wealthiest and wisest of kings could say this...!

The Bible is not against having riches; but it warns us against **depending** on riches. Paul instructed Timothy, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to **trust** in uncertain riches but in the living God,

who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17). The emphasis is that instead of trusting on “uncertain” riches, we must depend on the “living” God.

It’s actually “foolishness” to trust in riches. Luke recorded a parable of Jesus in Luke 12:15-21. Jesus was teaching here against covetousness. There is nothing wrong with extending barns. The problem is when the hoarder says to his soul, “You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease. Eat, drink and be merry,” his dependence is on the riches. Jesus calls him a fool. He said, “You fool, this night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will those things be which you have provided?” See the severity of the words of Jesus! On the other hand, there are several examples of men who were rich but they did not **depend** on riches—

□ Abraham was wealthy. His servant declared, “The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys” (Gen 24:35). But the heart of Abraham was not on the riches. We read about him in the New Testament, “By faith, he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb 11:9). Abraham detached

himself from anything material and temporary. Because, “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v10). And all these heroes of faith, “now desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (v16).

□ Job was another patriarch who did not depend on riches. “His possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East” (Job 1:3). Yes, he was the richest man in the East. The extent of his wealth can be compared to Mukesh Ambani of India! But Job did not idolise the riches. His testimony recorded in the 31st chapter of his book is a classic: “If I have made gold my hope, or said to fine gold, ‘You are my confidence;’ if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gained much; if I have observed the sun when it shines, or the moon moving in brightness, so that my heart has been secretly enticed and my mouth has kissed my hand; this also would be an iniquity deserving judgment, for I would have denied God who is above” (vv 24-28). Trust on riches is iniquity, according to Job.

□ The Gospel records bring out the characteristics of Joseph of Arimathea. He was known

to be a rich man (Mt 27:57). But he was “waiting for the Kingdom of God” (Mk 15:43). Though rich and wealthy, his priorities were rightly set. He had cut out a tomb for himself, perhaps as part of the culture of the rich of his times, but he was not attached even to his tomb! He gave it away to bury the body of Jesus (Mt 27:60).

God may bless us with increasing riches but we must never set our hearts on them. The Psalmist gives us a straightforward command on this: “If riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psa 62:10b). The question is not whether we have riches, but whether riches have us! How would we know if riches have a firm grip over us? If we are preoccupied with riches and base our moves on them, then they surely have us. Paul points out a few related things which must sink in our minds: “For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:18-21). The apostle contrasts earthly-mindedness against heavenly citizenship.

The Bible has still more to say concerning “riches” and “death.” Jesus so clearly taught against overaccumulation of wealth in His Sermon on the Mount. Mt 6:19-21, “Do not lay

up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also." When Jesus uses the word "treasures," He means accumulated wealth, which is way beyond what we need for a decent living. If we keep heaping wealth over wealth, we will tend to become arrogant. This kind of arrogance and boasting was condemned by Apostle James: Js 4:13-16, "Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit, whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow; for what is your life? It's even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. But now you boast in that arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

As we approach the end of our lives as well as the end of the age, we must ask ourselves the same question that was asked to Gehazi by Prophet Elisha: "Is it the time to receive money and receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?" (2 Ki 5:26b). Yes, beloved, godliness with contentment is great "gain" (1 Tim 6:6-8). How much will be enough? More will never be enough!

Give liberally to the needy. Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983), that saintly lady, said, "The measure of a life is not its *duration* but its *donation!*" Apostle Paul has spelt out a firm command to the rich, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to **give**, willing to **share**, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." The spirit of giving and generosity lays for us a good foundation for the future. When a man dies he clutches in his hands only that which he has given away in his lifetime! At death, we leave behind all we have and take with us all we gave!

Riches not given away are only to our hurt. King Solomon observed, "There is a severe evil that I have seen under the sun: riches kept for their owner to his hurt" (Eccl 5:13). Why do you think that rich man went to hell? Was it for stealing, murder or adultery? No, it was because he did not care for the beggar Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). We should uplift the poor with our riches. If God has given us more than what we need, it is in order to share with those who are in need. Js 1:9-11, "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass

away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls and its beautiful appearance perishes, so the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.”

If your riches are earnings through corruption, either you must return them to the wronged or give away to the poor — because the cry of the poor falls in the ears of God. That’s the message of James 5:1-5. “Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts” (v4).

If you have riches let them be like flowers on a dead man. They mean nothing to him. This is the pictorial message of Col 3:1-3, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

A world-renowned classic goes like this:

*This world is not my home;
I’m just a passing through;
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door;
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.*

Let’s confess, “Here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb 13:14).

4

Do not leave your dear ones in confusion.

Though death is common to both young and old, we are primarily addressing the “elderly” or the “senior citizens” who are closer than others to this event called “death.” God told King Hezekiah when he was sick, “Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live” (2 Ki 20:1). The same statement is repeated in the narrative in Isaiah 38:1. This entire chapter carries the story in greater detail. We might not be struck with a deadly disease like King Hezekiah, but anyone who has passed middle age and is at the evening of his life should take this lesson seriously.

Let’s look at certain practical aspects of “setting our house in order”—

□ Writing a Will falls first on the list. Making a Will does not mean lack of faith. The Biblical usage of this act is done in a good sense. We read in Hebrews 9:16,17, “Where there is a testament (will) there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in

force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.”

Be impartial while writing a Will. The boys and the girls must be treated alike. In fact, the girls can be given more because ours is a male-dominated society. Injustice to women in our country of India is too common. God’s Kingdom has to be remembered while writing the Will. Do not will everything for the children. Let them work hard and come up in life. Parents are responsible for what God has entrusted to them according to their stewardship.

I have a testimony to share here: I have told our daughter that one third of what God has blessed me with is for her, and the remaining two thirds for the work of the Kingdom of God and for the poor.

Do not postpone the writing of the Will for long. What can be spent today for God and His Kingdom must not be kept to fall into the hands of the Antichrist. We need to be real stewards and be faithful with the monetary and material blessings that God has entrusted in our hands. If you will immovable properties to service organisations or evangelistic missions, it will help them a long way.

Remember the confusion caused in Isaac’s family because of the delay in writing the Will (Gen 27:1,2). Isaac should have willed his

property well ahead. He got cheated because he waited and postponed this matter till the last day. Read the entire chapter with the context in mind to understand the confusion.

□ There are examples of Bible heroes who made provisions and plans for the family they were leaving behind—

Joseph made provisions for the future for all the members of his father’s family. Joseph saw to it that Pharaoh kept them well and comfortable. We read, “Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock.” Pharaoh was able to extend this support to Joseph’s family because he was thoroughly satisfied with Joseph’s life and his performance in the land (Gen 47:5,6). Joseph then assured his family saying, “Do not be afraid. For am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spoke kindly to them” (50:19-22). Joseph’s assurance kept them calm.

So did David. He provided for his father and mother though he was the last son. David said to the King of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come here with you till I know what God will do for me. So he brought them before the King of Moab and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold" (1 Sam 22:3,4).

The acts of Joseph and David were not out of fear or lack of faith. It was responsibility on their side to leave the ones they left behind comfortable and settled.

The Bible of course teaches that parents must save for their children. Paul wrote, "The children ought not to lay up for their parents, but the parents for the children" (2 Cor 12:14b). The responsibility is thus mutual.

□ Next, give guidance to the family members about ongoing relationships. Jesus gave John as a support to His widowed mother. Even though there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother and her sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (Jn 19:25-27). John has perhaps taken time to record this with the

present times in mind! Jesus was a down-to-earth responsible Son who handed His mother over to John though His aunt was there to be a company for His mother. What a scene!

Don't instruct your spouse about his or her remarriage. Let them decide that for themselves. Apostle Paul gave freedom to widows to remarry, even in the Jewish male-dominated society: "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies she is at liberty, to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39).

We don't have to unduly worry about whose wife the widow will rise up as in resurrection, if she marries the second time. The Bible teaches us that in resurrection there will only be a "reunion" and being like angels. There will not be a rising up with the relationship component or as marriage partners! Jesus taught this when the Pharisees asked Him about the woman who married seven brothers one after the other (Mt 22:23-31). Giving general guidelines to the unmarried children about choosing life partners is very welcome. But don't dictate to them on whom to marry! If your son or daughter senses a definite call in his or her life to go as a missionary, don't stop them to wait till your death. Remember what Jesus said in a similar situation (Lk 9:59,60).

□ Setting your house in order also includes leaving instructions to the family concerning your dead body. There are extended facilities to register your organs with reliable hospitals and agencies. Why bury your healthy eyes, kidneys and liver which can bless someone? Do inform your family about your registration and what to do immediately after death.

A husband told his wife: “If I ever become so ill that only machines can keep me alive, please tell the doctors to pull out the plug!” This is wisdom. This says it all.

How about Euthanasia? This is generally opposed by Bible believers. But allowing a natural process of death to run its course is not wrong by discontinuing extreme medical measures.

A word about funerals: In the strict sense, burning or burying makes no difference; it becomes dust to dust and ashes to ashes. The Bible was written in the Jewish culture where they always looked for a decent “burial.”

Next comes the question, “Where to bury?” Jacob left clear instructions for his surviving family on where he would like to be buried—“He charged them and said to them: I am to be gathered to my people, bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron, the Hittite” (Gen 49:29). You may tell your family

your desire like Jacob did. My wife and I have told our daughter: “Bury us wherever convenient.”

Instruct the family not to go for expensive tombs. Amy Carmichael (1861-1951) of Dohnavur, the Founder of the Star Fellowship, which ran a rescue mission against temple prostitution, asked for a simple birdbath to be kept as a memory in the place where she would be buried. Dr. Ida Scudder (1870-1956) of Vellore, the Founder of Christian Medical College Hospital, instructed that no statue should be erected for her.

Also tell your family not to keep the body for long expecting or praying to be raised. How such acts have brought dishonour to God!

□ Do not leave the family in debts. Do all that is possible to clear the debts in your lifetime. God does not always perform miracles as in the case of the prophet’s widow whom we meet in 2 Kings 4:1-4!



*May we keep our holy calling
Stainless in its fair renown,
That, when all the work is over,
And we lay the burden down,
Then the children Thou hast given
Still may be our joy and crown!*

— Christian Burke, 1857-1944

5

**Do not give place
to depression.**

When we refer to various stages of life, we say—

- Childhood memories
- Youthhood temptations
- Old age problems

It goes without saying that old age is definitely a difficult period. Psa 90:10, “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away.” This was the confession of “Moses the man of God.” Old age is always enveloped by lots of sorrow. Solomon wrote, “If a man lives many years, and rejoices in them all, yet, let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity” (Eccl 11:8). That’s why David prayed, “Do not cast me off in the time of old age. Do not forsake me when my strength fails” (Psa 71:9). The Scripture is placed before us so meaningfully. And is more than apt for the phase.

The causes of worry and depression in this old age are numerous—

(a) Declining health

“We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For this we groan earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 5:1-5). Yes, it’s a groaning experience! But God has given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee!

See how Paul triumphed in this situation: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). He then goes on to say, “Not only they but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (v23).

Even a prophet like Elisha with a double portion of the Spirit, died of a sickness. But though dead, even his dead bones could resurrect a man (2 Ki 13:14a,21).

In the light of eternity, suffering is for a short while. Job says, “ Man who is born of woman is of **few days** and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). “For when a **few years** are finished, I shall go to the way of no return” (16:22). Few days! Few years! Paul asserted, “Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a **moment** is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:16,17).

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), a Christian thinker, spoke these words of wisdom:

God whispers in our pleasures,
speaks in our conscience,
but shouts in our pains!

Is this not the experience of most of us?

(b) Problems in the family

The rebelliousness of children can cause lot of stress to ageing parents. Prophet Samuel’s sons were a thorn to him. 1 Sam 8:1-3, “When Samuel was old, he made his sons Judges over Israel ... They were Judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice.” They succeeded him as Judges in the ministry but were sold out to corruption. Though Samuel was not guilty of neglecting his family, they went astray. It is said

of him, “Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal and Mispah, and judged Israel in all those places. But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel and there he built an altar to the Lord” (1 Sam 7:15-17). Home was always on his priority list. Moreover, Samuel was one of the two men through whom God expressed His displeasure over Eli’s leniency towards his ungodly sons. As a parent, after you have done your best, leave the rest in the hands of God. Adult children are accountable for their actions.

The marital problems of children are yet another agony for parents in old age. With all the best efforts taken by parents in settling children in marriage, conflicts set in. The two daughters-in-law of Isaac were a grief to him and Rebecca (Gen 26:34,35). But Isaac handled the situation with positive responses and did not drown in depression. He instructed Esau to bring some hunt meat to receive his blessing (27:1-4), and instructed Jacob to choose a wife from his own people and not from the Hittites (27:46-28:2). Isaac did not sit and ruin himself in depression but worked in the opposite spirit.

Disrespect and ill-treatment by children cause pain in ageing parents. While writing the longest sin list in the Bible, Apostle Paul wrote that people would be “disobedient to parents,

unloving and unmerciful” (Rom 1:30,31). He predicted that in the last days people would be “disobedient to parents, unthankful, unloving, brutal and despisers of good” (2 Tim 3:2,3). Yes, they would be “without natural love.” Knowledge increases but love decreases. “Knowledge puffs up but love edifies,” which means that mere knowledge without love puffs up (1 Cor 8:1). Most of our youngsters are rich in computer knowledge but paupers in natural affection and practical wisdom. This attitude hurts parents deeply. King Solomon pointed out how children could grow so insensitive that they would least empathise with the feelings of parents. He writes, “He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother is a son who causes shame and brings reproach” (Prov 19:26). Don’t take it too much to heart if you have to face this situation and spend the rest of your life in an old age home. Stay there and enjoy the presence of God.

Beware of children who try to empty your purse! This too is pointed out in the Bible. Prov 28:24, “Whoever robs his father or his mother and says it’s no transgression, the same is companion to a destroyer.” Don’t let children exploit you. Don’t give away all your savings and properties to your children too soon. Keep a portion with you to keep the rest of your lifetime comfortable. This is practical wisdom and prudence.

(c) Unanswered prayers

Worry and depression in old age can also be due to unanswered prayers, unfulfilled desires and dreams, unsolved puzzles and unsettled matters. These will give rise to doubt, unbelief, loss of assurance and confidence. But you can experience the Psalmist’s assurance: “O Lord, You number my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book when I cry out to You?” (Psa 56:8). The only solution prescribed for parents going through this rough patch is to keep trusting in God and God alone! Look at the repetitious truth in verses 4,10 and 11 —

In God I will praise His Word,
In God I have put my trust;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?
In God I will praise His Word,
In the Lord I will praise His Word,
In God I have put my trust;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?

George Muller (1805-1898) kept praying for two drunkard friends for 40 long years. But change and conversion came only when they listened to the sermon at his funeral. They also went out as overseas missionaries.

The only way to come out of the depressing mood is to remember God’s blessings of the

past. Isa 46:9,10, "Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me. Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand and I will do all My pleasure." When we don't forget the benefits of the past we will be renewed through and through. We are familiar with Psalm 103:1-5, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. He forgives all your iniquities, He heals all your diseases, He redeems your life from destruction, He crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, He satisfies your mouth with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Go through your diaries!

Count your blessings—instead of your crosses;
Count your gains — instead of your losses;
Count your health — instead of your wealth;
Count on God — instead of yourself!

An old man's convictions:

I shall not mind the whiteness of my hair,
or that slow steps falter on the stair,
or that young friends hurry as they pass,
or what strange image greets me in the mirror;
if I can feel as the roots feel in the sod that
I am growing old to bloom before God's face!

Keep on praising God— "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the Lord" (Psa 104:33,34).

Make the confession of Jesus yours: "I foresaw the Lord always before My face, for He is at My right hand that I may not be shaken. Therefore My heart rejoiced and My tongue was glad. Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave My soul in Hades. Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to Me the ways of life; You will make Me full of joy in Your presence" (Acts 2:25-28).



*So when my latest breath
Shall rend the veil in twain,
By death I shall escape from death,
And life eternal gain.
Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word,
And oft repeat before the Throne,
"For ever with the Lord!"*

— James Montgomery, 1771-1854

6 Do not ever contemplate suicide.

When depression, worry and anxiety are not properly handled, man thinks of suicide as an option or sometimes as the final resort. What does the Bible teach about suicide?

The Bible does not directly forbid suicide; but it abounds with examples and principles to tell us that suicide is never God's perfect will for anyone. Here are some **examples**:

— Abimelech (Judg 9:50-57)

He ruled as the King of Israel for three years and chose to kill himself as a result of his wickedness.

— King Saul (1 Sam 31:4; 1 Chr 10:4)

He fell on his spear when he lost his sanity and stability.

— Ahithophel (2 Sam 17:23)

He hanged himself when his plot against King David failed.

— Zimri (1 Ki 16:17-20)

As a commander of chariots, he burned himself following his evil deeds against God.

— The New Testament records only one event of suicide. It was that of Judas Iscariot who hanged himself out of guilt and remorse (Mt 27:5). Jesus called him the “son of perdition.” In His High Priestly prayer, Jesus said, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your Name. Those whom You gave Me, I have kept. And none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (Jn 17:12). Apostle Peter comments in Acts 1:25 that Judas “fell from apostleship by transgression.”

None of these men was in the state of “godliness” when they committed suicide. And there's absolutely no record in the Bible of any godly man committing suicide.

While blessing the people of Israel prophet Balaam said, “Let me die the death of the righteous: let my end be like his!” (Num 23:10).

Looking at the above examples of suicide, how can we take it as an option for death? Haven't we read, “Precious, in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints?” (Psa 116:15). This cannot be a suicidal death.

Next let's us consider some Biblical **principles** relating to suicide—

Even before the Ten Commandments were given, God was against taking someone's life: Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God, He made man." It is stated again in Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder!" One may argue that this is about killing another person. "Don't I have the right to take away my own life?" No. Because we don't belong to ourselves. We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19,20, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." We also read in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Here again the "body" is given importance and comes first. The emphasis is on the judgment according to what's done on the "body."

The Bible teaches that our times are in "God's" hand. We have no right to take it in "our" hands (Psa 31:15).

Life is a "gift of God" from beginning to end. He does "everything beautiful in its time!" He

knows what to do and when with our lives. It's His prerogative! It's His sovereign will (Eccl 3:11-13).

On the face of these Bible examples and principles we conclude that suicide is unacceptable in the sight of God! The secular law is also against suicide.

Desiring death is not uncommon as well—

□ Moses cried to God, "I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now — if I have found favour in Your sight — and do not let me see my wretchedness." These were Moses' tired and drained words (Num 11:14,15).

□ Once Prophet Elijah came to this point. "He went a day's journey into the desert, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Ki 19:4). He expressed this death-wish while running for life on Jezebel's threat.

Look at these two outstanding prophets: Moses and Elijah! God did not listen to their prayers. He conducted Moses' burial who died naturally, and took Elijah away without death!

□ Job felt the same. "My soul chooses strangling and death rather than my body. I

loathe my life: I would not live for ever. Leave me alone. But my days are but a breath” (Job 7:15,16). He desired death because of his agony and misery. (There are numerous references to “death” in the Book of Job — 3:21,22; 6:11; 10:18,19).

□ Prophet Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth (Jer 20:14-18). Read the passage well to understand the intensity of his vexation. “He groaned, Why did not God kill me from the womb?” These painful words spilled out of his mouth because his ministry was becoming more and more unpopular because of the toughness of his message.

□ Prophet Jonah’s dip in his mood is not new to us. Jonah 4:8, “It happened when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself and said, It is better for me to die than to live.” The plant withered and the east wind caused him a severe headache.

These men “desired” death, but they did not “attempt” suicide.

Suicidal tendency is demonic. Jesus healed an epileptic who often fell into fire and water (Mt 17:15,18). The devils make even the animals to commit suicide. We read about how the demons went out of a possessed man and

entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned (Lk 8:30,33).

We need to treat suicidal tendency like any other temptation. Both Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot sinned against the Lord. Both of them regretted deeply. One turned to Jesus with tears of repentance; the other killed himself in remorse. We can always turn to God, whatever be the sin. He is abundant in mercies. Moses spoke to Israelites saying, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death; blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both you and your descendants may live” (Dt 30:19). “Life and death” are placed before us. Let’s choose life!

You probably are suffering from an incurable disease which is wasting your body. Remember the words of Job: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold Him, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27). This has also been the “yearning” of the saints. Apostle Paul wrote, “We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made of hands, eternal in the heavens. For this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our

habitation which is from heaven. If indeed having been clothed, we shall not be found naked” (2 Cor 5:1-3). We see here an intense desire and an agonising yearning to see God face to face.

Are you a total failure in your job or in the business you have undertaken? Acts 16 narrates an event which happened in the life of the Prison Officer in Philippi right at his workspot where Paul and Silas were imprisoned. The Officer drew his sword and was about to kill himself when he found the prison doors open. He feared that he might lose his job and life, if the prisoners had fled. But Paul stopped him with a loud voice, “Do yourself no harm!” (vv 23-34). Yes, this is a message that comes to all of us with a “loud voice!” Praise God it ended as salvation for the entire family of the Jailor because he listened to God’s servants and overcame the temptation to commit suicide!



*O Giver unto man of breath,
O Holder of the keys of death,
O Quickener of the life within,
Save us from death, the death of sin;
That body, soul, and spirit be
For ever living unto Thee!*

— John Ellerton, 1826-1893

HOW NOT TO DIE

7

Do not become lazy.

It’s natural for most people to slow down when they near old age. But slowness must not lead to idleness. “An idle mind becomes the devil’s workshop.”

□ The Bible abounds with examples of men and women who were active in old age:

- Noah had crossed 500 years of age when God called him to build the ark (Gen 5:32; 7:6).
- Abraham was 75 years old when God called him to become a blessing to the whole world (Gen 12:4).
- Moses was 80 years old when God called him to leave Sinai and return to Egypt to lead His people out (Acts 7:23,30).
- Barzillai was a “very aged man” of 80 years when he helped King David in his flight due to his son’s revolt (2 Sam 19:31-39). He gave David “protection” and “provisions.” He escorted him across

Jordan (v31). He provided David and his men with beds, vessels, food and milk for they were hungry and thirsty in the wilderness (17:28,29). If he had said that he was too old to do such things, David and his men would have perished!

- Zachariah was quite old but he kept on serving as a priest faithfully. He did not stop his mission (Lk 1:7,8).
 - Anna was a widow of 84 years, but she continued to serve God “in the Temple” with fasting and prayers night and day! The Bible says that she even didn’t depart from the Temple but served God (Lk 2:36-38).
 - Apostle Paul continued his ministerial tours though he was quite old. He writes about himself as “the aged” and requests for a “guest room” to be made ready for him which means he was busy travelling! (Philemon 9,22)
- We find in history too examples of men and women active in the old age:
- Michaelangelo was composing poetry and designing structures at 89. Would you believe, he painted ceilings lying on his back on a scaffold while he neared 90?
 - Webster wrote his famous dictionary when he was 70!

— John Wesley, at 83, was annoyed that he could not write for more than 15 hours a day. And at 86, he was ashamed that he could not preach more than twice a day!

— Mother Teresa, a heart patient and with so many other ailments, kept ministering to the unwanted and the unlovable, until she died at 87.

— Mother Brand, even in her 80’s and 90’s, could not stop herself from visiting tribal villages in Kolli Hills, being carried by men.

— Dr. E. Stanley Jones, at 87, in spite of a stroke, dictated his last book, “*The Divine Yes.*”

My dad, a retired Army Officer, sold Bibles, daily devotionals and hymn books till the day prior to his death in Nazareth. My mother visited families in Vellore, prayed for them and raised funds for missionary work until she could walk or write no more.

The Bible’s call to keep ourselves busy till death is unmistakable and clear: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no **work** or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccl 9:10). Solomon has given us the message with no ambiguity whatsoever.

Jesus said, “I must **work** the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (Jn 9:4).

Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, “This corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal has to put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Cor 15:54,55). He goes on to say, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the **work** of the Lord, knowing that your **labour** is not vain in the Lord” (v 58). We may retire from an organisation but never from God’s work!

David sings, “O God, You have taught me from my youth and to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I **declare** Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come” (Psa 71:17,18). David had not lost the vigour even after he had turned grayheaded.

Paul was very honest and true to the Philippians when he said, “I am hardpressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the body is more **needful** for you” (Phil 1:23,24). Paul writes here about his twin desire: to depart from the world and at the same time to continue to minister to the people!

Even on the Cross, Jesus was busy winning a soul for the Kingdom of God! (Lk 23:42,43).

We have an excellent promise for those who keep on winning souls: Dan 12:2,3, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”

D.L. Moody desired that an engraving of two legs carrying the gospel be made on his tomb!

Here are some practical tips to keep yourself busy when old—

☐ *Spend time in reading.*

Have you ever realised there are still so many books in your shelf not read! Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come and the books, especially the parchments” (2 Tim 4:13). When Paul wrote this he was preparing himself for his end (vv 6,7,8). Listen to music and messages in CDs and DVDs. Audio Bibles are available and can be listened to, if hearing is preferred over reading. A Jewish proverb goes like this: “For the ignorant, old age is as winter; for the informed, it is a harvest!”

☐ *Write down whatever you can.*

Paul wrote to the Philippians just before his death, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live on in the body, this will mean

fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hardpressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the body is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith” (Phil 1:21-25). Such words of Paul became an Epistle of Joy.

Paul wrote to Timothy too, just before his death. He wrote, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim 4:6-8). Such words which Paul wrote to Timothy became a Pastoral Epistle.

Peter, like Paul, wrote before his death. He wrote to the believers, “Yes, I think it’s right as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (2 Pet 1:13,14). Such words became an Epistle of Warning against false apostles and teachers.

John wrote the Book of Revelation when he was in his nineties.

Moses spoke the entire Book of Deuteronomy on the day of his death (Dt 1:3; 31:2; 32:48-50).

Amy Carmichael (1861-1951) spent her last 36 years bedridden due to the fracture of a leg. During this period she wrote 1000s of letters, about 13 books and many pages of poetry.

I have published 200 of my select Sermon Outlines, some of them not preached yet, from my 53 years of pulpit ministry, as a 1200-page volume, titled, “*Bible Pearls*.” I am ready to be called Home even today (2017)! I continue to write! I personally translated the entire book into Tamil also, which is my mother tongue!

These writings written with maturity and wisdom will bless generations.

□ *Communicate truths to youngsters and nextliners.*

Bildad told Job, “Inquire please, of the former age and consider the things discovered by their fathers; for we were born yesterday and know nothing. Because our days on earth are a shadow, will they not teach you and tell you and utter words from their heart? Wisdom is with aged men and with length of days understanding” (Job 8:8-10; 12:12).

Psalms 48 begins with the celebration of God’s greatness, and concludes with these words: “Walk about Zion and go all around her. Count her towers; mark well her bulwarks;

consider her palaces that you may tell it to the generation following; for this is God our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death” (vv12-14).

Take time to read the last words of Moses, Joshua, Jacob, David, Samuel, Paul and Peter. The wisdom these men carried did not die with them because they WROTE! Peter even endeavoured to make provisions for folks to remember timeless truths (2 Pet 1:13-15).

□ *Make arrangements for the work to continue.*

Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land, but he appointed the next leader and gave sufficient instructions to the people. David, likewise, was not allowed by God to build the temple, but he made sufficient provisions for the building (1 Chr 22:1-8). The Bible records, “David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and was buried with his fathers and saw no corruption” (Acts 13:36).

□ *Extend voluntary help to Charitable and Religious organisations.*

Keep doing something worthwhile until you can. Here’s the Biblical promise: “Their **works** shall follow them” (Rev 14:13).

□ *Stretch a helping hand to domestic works.*

Francis of Assisi, mowing his garden, was asked what he would do if he were suddenly to

learn that he was to die at sunset that day. He answered, “I would finish mowing my garden!” You don’t need to be in a prayer meeting when you die or Jesus comes. You can be plowing in the field or grinding in the kitchen (Lk 17:35,36).

St. Patrick of the 4th century prayed like this—

*God, be in my head, and in my understanding;
God, be in my eyes, and in my looking;
God, be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God, be in my heart and in my thinking;
God, be in my end, and at my departure!*

Follow these principles and you will bear fruit in your old age, too. Psalm 92:14, “They shall bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing.”

The hymn by William Wright (1859-1924) is quite encouraging —

*March on, my soul, with strength,
March forward, void of fear;
He who hath led will lead,
While year succeedeth year;
And as thou goest on thy way,
His hand shall hold thee day by day.*

*March on, my soul, with strength,
With strength, but not thine own;
The conquest thou shalt gain,
Through Christ thy Lord alone;
His grace shall nerve thy feeble arm,
His love preserve thee safe from harm.*

8

Do not stop sanctifying yourself.

As we get older and older, we must endeavour to become more and more holy. George Whitefield (1714-1770), the Prince of Open-air Preachers, said, "Take care of your life; God will take care of your death!"

Casualness invariably leads to backsliding. The Bible tells us about so many kings and leaders who started off well but did not finish well. Solomon is one classic example. Here's the sad verse that speaks of him: 1 Ki 11:4, "When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David."

Referring to the temptation of fleshly lust a question was asked by an youngster to an old preacher of 85 years, "When will these temptations stop?" "I will tell you when I come to that age," was the answer! We never become too old to be tempted. We should always be serious with our walk with God.

C.T. Studd (1862-1931), that famous Cricketer who went as a Missionary to Africa, is told of reading an old Bible with a lantern even when his eyesight turned dim. When asked by a friend as to what he was doing, he replied, "I'm approaching the end of my life. I want to find out if there's any commandment in the Bible I have left out!"

As we grow older in our walk with God, the light becomes brighter and brighter. "The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the mid-day" (Prov 4:18). The light shines brighter and brighter, so we can see our sins and shortcomings more clearly, especially our sins of "omission." At the beginning of his life, Job asked God, "Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O, Watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target?" (Job 7:20). But towards the end of his life he confessed, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5,6).

Prophet Ezekiel gives a call for all ages: Ezek 18:30-32, "I will judge you, O, house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions which you have committed and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the

Lord. Therefore turn and live.” A call to take life seriously! A time of self-examination will be helpful.

Death is the result of sin in general; but we can avoid it as a direct punishment for any specific sin. Here are a few concrete examples of those who received death as a direct punishment for sin —

☐ King Saul “died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the Word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. He did not inquire of the Lord; therefore, He killed him, and turned the Kingdom over to David the son of Jesse” (1 Chr 10:13,14). God was upset over King Saul’s unfaithfulness and deviation from His Word.

☐ Ananias and Sapphira were dishonest in money matters and lied to God’s servant Peter and the Holy Spirit. They died the same day and just there as a result of sin (Acts 5).

☐ King Herod was struck dead while he was doing an oration because he did not give glory to God. The Bible says that the angel of the Lord struck him immediately and he was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12:23).

☐ We are also taught that whoever eats and drinks the bread and the wine served at the Lord’s Table in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. Self-

examination becomes vital here. Paul writes in 1 Cor 11:29,30, “He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason, many are weak and sick among you and many sleep.”

As we grow older, our arteries become harder; let it not be so with our hearts! “Lord, make me to know my end and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am” (Psa 39:4). This was David’s prayer acknowledging his end and frailty.

King Hezekiah testified, following his recovery from a dreadful disease, “What shall I say? God has both spoken to me and He Himself has done it. I shall walk carefully all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O, Lord, by these things men live. And in all these things is the life of my spirit. So You will restore me and make me live. Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness. But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption; for You have cast all my sins behind Your back” (Isa 38:15-17). In other words, Hezekiah said that he would not take casual steps in life but would walk carefully.

Irritation, spirit of complaining, intolerance and loss of sweetness can all be characteristics of old age. The list may even grow longer, but remember always to lead by example. You’re being watched!

The prayer of an old saint goes like this:

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference!*

The Apostles did most of their writings towards the end of their lives. They wrote about the hard truths and the hard realities that they had learnt over a lifetime. Reference to nonstop sanctification figures out prominently in their writings—

□ John writes about consistent and constant purification till the end, saying, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn 3:2,3). John writes again in Revelation 22:11, “He who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.”

□ Peter writes to the believers in his second Epistle, “God’s divine power has given to us all things... by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 1:4). And he goes

on to say, “For this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (vv 5-7). He adds more in verses 10 & 11 saying, “Therefore, brothers, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure; for if you do these things, you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

□ Just like John and Peter who have been challenging the believers on becoming holier and more diligent in the things of God, Paul encourages us, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well-pleasing to Him” (2 Cor 5:8,9). Going back, he has written in the first Epistle comparing the Christian walk to a race: “Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown; but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:25-27).

□ The trio, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, exhorted the believers in the Thessalonian Church: 1 Thess 5:21-24, “Test all things. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” We should do our part of self-examination and sanctification, and God will complete the sanctification and perfect it.

Beware of backsliding towards the end of your life! We need to run well and finish the race and most importantly by the rules! Hebrews 10:35-39, “Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: for yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition but of those who believe in the saving of the soul.” It’s a dangerous condition. Having come so far... having run so much of the race... you have to endure a little more.

If you feel you have lost your passion for holiness for whatever reason, ask God to restore it to you. We read about Him, “A bruised reed

He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, until He will bring forth justice for truth” (Isa 42:3). He will encourage the discouraged. He is a good Lord. He will restore to us that original zeal and passion.

We have a glorious promise left for us in Romans 8:30, “Whom God predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified!” What an assurance we have as we walk towards the last days of our lives! I remember Isaiah 57:1,2, “The righteous shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his *uprightness*.”



*To him that o’ercometh,
God giveth a crown;
Through faith we shall conquer,
Though often cast down;
He who is our Saviour
Our strength will renew,
Look ever to Jesus,
He will carry you through!*

— H.R. Palmer, 1834-1907

9 Do not be horribly afraid of death.

The Bible acknowledges that the “fear of death” is the commonest among men. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews plainly states, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, Jesus Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy Him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through **fear of death** were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:14,15). The fear of death keeps men and women under bondage. The very purpose of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus is to deliver us from this fear.

Though the Psalmist had a deep devotional life and was close to God, he was not free from this fear. He writes in Psalm 55:4, “My heart is severely pained within me and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.” He says about the pain of death, “The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of sheol laid hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow” (Psa 116:3). But God’s view of death is quite different from man’s —

Man sees death as something to be avoided;
God views it as something to be anticipated.

Man sees death as a gloomy dark night;
God describes it as a glorious new day.

Man sees death as the end of the journey;
God sees it as the beginning of the best journey.

The Bible treats death with dignity. It says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psa 116:15). Let us look at the various analogies of death as found in the Bible—

□ It’s a “**sleep**.” A few days after Lazarus’ death, Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus **sleeps**, but I go that I may wake him up.” Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” “However Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep” (Jn 11:11-13). The words “death” and “sleep” are interchangeably used.

Paul, when he wrote to the Thessalonian Christians about death, said, “I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen **asleep**, lest you sorrow as others, who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13).

□ Another analogy of death is “**a ship leaving the shore**.” Paul wrote to the Philippian believers, “I am hardpressed between the two, having a desire to **depart** and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil 1:23). When Paul wrote

to Timothy, he said, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my **departure** is at hand” (2 Tim 4:6).

□ Death is an **exodus** or a **journey**. At the event of the transfiguration experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, the subject was on “parting.” We read in Luke 9:31 about Moses and Elijah “who appeared in glory and spoke of His **decease** which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Peter wrote, “Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my **departure**” (2 Pet 1:15).

□ “**Removal of garment**” is another analogy. Peter wrote, “Knowing that shortly I must **put off** my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me ...” (2 Pet 1:14). Similarly Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). The earthly house, a tent, is likened to a garment removed.

□ The act of **sowing** is yet another analogy for death. Paul writes about resurrection following death, “The body is **sown** in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is **sown** in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is **sown** in weakness, it is raised in power” (1 Cor 15:42-44).

This is why Christians announce the death of believers as being “promoted to glory!” Death is not extinguishing the light; but it’s putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.

John Bunyan (1628-1688), the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, has made an eyeopening statement in his book: “Death is but a passage out of prison into a palace!”

The fear of death is usually because of the unknown future. Our belief about the afterlife affects our attitude to death. Let’s look at certain Biblical passages on the afterlife of a believer in Christ—

□ Even after mighty and heavenly revelations, Daniel did not understand many things. Though he did not understand so much of those prophetic revelations, he was simply asked to go his way peacefully into the future. “You will not perish but you will rise again in your time,” was the promise given. This we know by what is recorded in Daniel 12:8,9,13: “Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, My Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And He said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”

□ Our bodies go to the dust, but our spirits to God! Eccl 12:7, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

□ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 paints a vivid picture about our earthly body: “The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown as a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body.” Verses 48,49 go on to say, “As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” The man of dust turns into a heavenly man. What a wonderful explanation!

□ Why did Christ ascend back to Heaven? He ascended not only to be seated at the right hand of the Father but also to prepare a place for us. Jesus assured, “Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14:1-3). Being literally with Jesus is an awesome afterlife blessing!

□ Apostle Paul put it this way: 1 Corinthians 2:9,10a, “It is written, Eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man

the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” These are beyond human comprehension! God has revealed only a portion of it in the Book of Revelation. We would say something similar to what the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon. She exclaimed, “When I was in Sheba, not even half of what I’ve seen here was told to me!” Yes, we would say, “Not a fraction has been said.”

Paul wrote, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor 13:12).

□ When the world bids us “farewell” at death, Jesus is there with words of “welcome!” “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, Come, you blessed of My Father; inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25:34). This welcome was accorded to Stephen. He was dying as a martyr. He saw the Son of God “standing” on the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:55). This was a sign of welcome to Stephen who was not even an apostle. He was just a deacon. I believe this welcome is for every child of God.

□ Look at the longing of the Old Testament saints. Psalm 73:24,25, “You will guide me with

Your counsel and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.” This is the ultimate blessing of afterlife. Fear of death usually indicates a weak relationship with God.

Fanny Crosby (1823-1915), who became blind a few weeks after birth due to wrong medication, was asked by a friend if she would like to be healed of her blindness. “The first person I want to see is Jesus,” was her instant reply. Here’s a beautiful VBS chorus —

*Heaven is a wonderful place;
Filled with glory and grace;
I want to see my Saviour’s face;
Heaven is a wonderful place!*

Evangelist D.L.Moody (1837-1899)

told about death:

The earth is receding;
Heaven is beckoning;
This is the Day of my Coronation!
O death! How sweet!

□ The Holy Spirit is the “guarantee” for these blessings. How do we know that we have a glorious future? Paul assured the Corinthian Church, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 5:5). God is the seat of assurance. Guarantee here means “down

payment.” This is the picture of a shopkeeper who fixes a seal on the log selected by the carpenter when the latter makes down payment. The log simply lies in the shop awaiting the day it would be transported by the carpenter to his carpentry shop by sea or road.

David sings in Psalm 23:4, “Though I walk through the valley of shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” Assured of this truth, John Wesley said in his deathbed: “The greatest of all is, God is with us!”

It is this understanding that made Apostle Paul to declare, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). He adds, “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (v23).

We are to simply surrender our spirits into God’s hand just like how Jesus did at the cross— “When Jesus cried out with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Your hands, I commit My spirit.” Having said this, “He breathed His last” (Lk 23:46). Stephen, like Jesus, prayed at death, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Hear Martin Luther’s dying words. He said thrice, “Into Thy hands I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O God of Truth!”

Here's a stanza from Fanny Crosby's
Blessed Assurance —

*Perfect submission, perfect delight!
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from Above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love!*

Strictly speaking, a Christian is not looking for his death, but for the “blessed hope” (Tit 2:13; 2 Tim 4:6-8). It's not death but the afterlife that matters! Of course there's nothing wrong in praying: “O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days!” (Psa 102:24).

The famous hymn, “*Rock of Ages*,” ends like this —

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment-throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!*

— A. M. Toplady, 1740-1778

HOW NOT TO DIE

10 Do not grieve without hope.

The first nine lessons are mainly meant for those who are going to face death. This tenth lesson is for the bereaved, those who are left behind.

Grieving over the dead is not wrong. The Bible nowhere has condemned mourning. Abraham mourned for his wife: “Sarah died in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her” (Gen 23:2). Joseph mourned for his father. It's recorded in Genesis 50:1,7, “Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him.” David mourned over his son, Absalom. The passage in 2 Sam 18:33-19:1 narrates how deep his grieving was: “The King was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: O my son, Absalom — my son, my son Absalom — if only I had died in your place! O Absalom, my son! And Joab was told, Behold, the King is weeping and mourning for Absalom!” When Jesus was told about the torturous death of John the Baptist, He went to

a deserted place to grieve over John's death (Mt 14:12,13). Jesus wept for Lazarus even though He knew He would raise him (Jn 11:35). The Church and the devout men lamented over Stephen: Acts 8:2, "Devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." If Ephaphroditus had died, Paul would have experienced "sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil 2:27).

We may not only mourn over our dear ones, but we are also to mourn with those who mourn. We are not to criticise those who mourn. Rom 12:15b, "Weep with those who weep." Don't question their faith. Cry with them.

But we are not to grieve "without HOPE." Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have **no hope**" (1 Thess 4:13). He gives some "inspired information" as against the "ignorance." This teaching did not flow out of Paul's imagination or speculation but according to God's revelation. Paul goes on to say in verse 14, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." Just like Jesus rose again we too will ! This he speaks "by the word of the Lord" (v15). What is going to happen on that big day? "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (v16). There's going

to be a shout, a voice and a trumpet of God. This is celebration and jubilation. "And we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (v17). Paul concludes this subject in verse 18 saying, "Therefore, comfort one another with these words!"

This was the prophetic expectation of King David also. His child was sick unto death. He was fasting and weeping over his illness. But when the child died, he got up, anointed himself and started eating. People questioned him on his change of behaviour. He answered that he hoped for healing when the child was alive; but when the child died, the child was not going to come to him; but he would go to the child (2 Sam 12:22,23). What a glorious expectation!

Grief will be more if it's an "**untimely**" **death**. Strictly speaking, there's no untimely death for God's children. God calls them Home when their job on earth is over. We will not die one minute before or after God's appointed time! Because, our times are in His hands!

According to Biblical reports, Moses died too young. "He was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour diminished" (Dt 34:7). But he had finished his job!

God in His wisdom and foreknowledge may decide for the person to die before bad days. Isa 57:1,2, “The righteous perishes and no man takes it to heart. Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace. They shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”

Grief will be intolerable if **children** die. We come across a tragic event in Matthew 2:16-18, “Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry and he went forth and put to death all the male children in Bethlehem and in all its districts from two years old and under according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning. Rachel was weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more.” Obviously Rachel lost more than one child and she wailed! We need to be comforted knowing that children go straight into the Kingdom of God whether or not they are born to Christian parents. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 19:14). In Heaven their angels always see the face of the Father (18:10). What an assurance!

Don't worry even if you don't get the **body** for burial. Those days had only sea voyage and road travel as modes of travel. There was no

aircrash during those days as there were no aircrafts! That's why we read in Rev 20:13, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it.” We know of several martyrs who were burnt alive into ashes (1 Cor 13:3). Some martyrs were eaten up by animals!

Don't ever attempt to communicate with the dead! This is strictly prohibited in the Scriptures. If you are at crossroads in need of guidance, why do you need the counsel of the dead, when we have the living Word of God? “One who conjures spells or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead... For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out before you” (Dt 18:11,12). This cannot be told us more clearly. Our only source of guidance is the written Word of God. Isa 8:19,20, “When they say to you, seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter, should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” Why go into the dark when we have the light?

We cannot pray FOR the dead also. It's appointed unto men to die once and then be judged (Heb 9:27). Some people quote “baptism for the dead” as an excuse for praying for the

dead (1 Cor 15:29). This is not an apostolic doctrine. There was a practice of baptising for the dead in Paul's time. He simply quoted it for driving home his own point. This is not a Biblical practice at all. Neither should we pray TO the dead. There is only one Mediator between God and man, and that is Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5; 1 Jn 2:1).

Can we visit the tombs of the dear ones? The Bible does not prohibit it. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). Obviously they had kept the tombs with dignity and respect. The Jews whitewashed it periodically. That's why Jesus called them, "You whitewashed tombs," when He rebuked the hypocrites. It's ironical that several of those who oppose visiting tombs travel all the way to Israel to see an empty tomb!

Do not offer anything to the dead at tombs. We read in Psalm 106:28, "They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus they provoked the Lord to anger with their deeds." Sadly this very wrong practice is in vogue in some circles of Christendom.

We have a promise here to lift us up: "The Lord will swallow up death forever, and will wipe

away tears from all faces" (Isa 25:8). "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). Why grieve endlessly over an event that only ushers us into the literal presence of God?

Here's an immortal hymn from Isaac Watts (1674-1748) —

*How bright these glorious spirits shine!
Whence all their white array?
How came they to the blissful seats
Of everlasting day?*

*Lo! these are they, from sufferings great,
Who came to realms of light,
And in the blood of Christ have washed
Those robes that shine so bright.*

*Now with triumphal palms they stand
Before the Throne on high,
And serve the God they love, amidst
The glories of the sky.*

*In pastures green He'll lead His flock
Where living streams appear;
And God Himself from every eye
Shall wipe away the tear.*

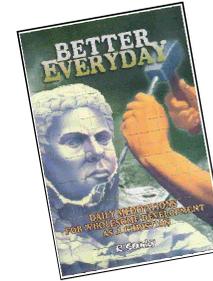
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