

## FEAR – FAMILY – FAITH 6

### “Fear of Death”

*Because God’s children are human beings – made of flesh and blood – the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. Heb. 2: 14-15*

Are you afraid to die? The fear of death ranks as one of the greatest fears known to human beings. Today we’ll continue this series on dealing with commonly held fears, and consider some steps to overcome the Fear of Death.

Most of us fear death. Many of us Christians know we shouldn’t...so we answer the question in the negative, but the reality is...many of us still fear death. We’ve been taught to believe that if we have Jesus living in us then we aren’t supposed to be afraid, but there are a number of reasons why so many of us still fear death.

Here are the 3 most common reasons why people fear death.

1) People fear death because they don’t understand it. They don’t know what it feels like to have their brain waves cease functioning. They don’t know how taking a last breath feels, or having our heart stop, feels. They don’t understand the physiological processes that render one dead...so...as so often happens...we end up fearing what we don’t understand. We may have watched someone die, or even been close to death; but neither experience helps us fully know and completely understand the passage from life, through death, to that eternal existence thereafter.

2) Some people fear death because each of us must go through that final “step” completely alone...or so we believe. Even when surrounded by family and friends, hospital or hospice staff; the final moment is one taken by each individual...completely alone...or so some think.

3) Some people fear death because they are afraid to stand before Almighty God. Jonathon Edwards in his classic sermon; Sinners in the Hands of and Angry God, remarked that people ought to be afraid to stand before Almighty God...if they have not yet dealt with the sin problems in their personal life. I couldn't agree more! If we have settled the issues of repentance, forgiveness, and being born anew...then we have no fear of standing before God, because Jesus stands between us. I'm certain there are probably other reasons people fear death and dying, but my point today is to help us find some helpful **Steps to Overcome the fear of Death:**

### **1. LIVE WITH NO REGRETS**

*You don't want to end your life full of regrets, nothing but sin and bones, saying, "oh, why didn't I do what they told me? Why did I reject a disciplined life? Why didn't I listen to my mentors, or take my teachers seriously? My life is ruined! I haven't one blessed thing to show for my life!"* Proverbs 5:11-14 (The Message)

The best and most practical way I know for reducing or overcoming the fear of death is to make sure that we live our life with no regrets. Elizabeth Kubler Ross, the psychologist who made a life studying the effects of death once explained what I mean: "It is those who have not really lived – who have left issues unsettled, dreams unfulfilled, hopes shattered, and who have let the real things in life ie: (loving and being loved by others, and contributing in a positive way to other people's happiness) pass them by – who are most reluctant to die."

I know it is not always possible to constantly be thinking about not having any regrets, so it must become subconscious, or natural, or a foundational philosophy which emanates into a regretless life. Here is what I mean. Discover God's purpose for your life...not by studying a book, not by attending a college, or a church, not by enlisting a self-help coach...but by living faithfully, and completely every day, until God makes it plain what God wants you to do with your life. If your purpose is to relieve others suffering...then be employed in doing that. If your purpose is to encourage people, then find and fulfill that calling. If your purpose is to be a leader, then lead like Christ.

If your purpose is to be a teacher, or a coach, or a mom...then discover that purpose, and be completely engaged in fulfilling that purpose. Fulfilling God's purpose is one of the surest ways to not have any regrets when we reach the finish line. One of the best ways to live with no regrets is to know and do what God has called and created you to be and do. If (as in my case) your life purpose is to empower people to authentically know God; then be engaged with people always, seeking to lead them to God.

Think about what regrets you have right now, at this point/stage in your life. Can you undo, or redo, or still do anything to alleviate those? Then do it! Then begin to incorporate this world and life-view that finds you living out God's purpose for your life... and you'll end with no regrets.

### **To Overcome the Fear of Death:**

## **2. LIVE WITH ONE WHO HAS ALREADY DIED.**

Wouldn't it make sense, if you are having fearful dread of dying, to sit and visit with one who has experienced it? Wouldn't those of you who have lost loved ones like to know what their journey was like from this life to the next? You talk about increasing our understanding...being able to walk and talk and live with someone who has already experienced whatever we fear...man that would be a great comfort, wouldn't it? Seeing and knowing and discussing my fear of jumping out of an airplane might be long-served by visiting with someone who has successfully navigated such an adventure.

Well, listen to this; we can live, and walk, and talk with someone who has been to the other side! There is a being who has navigated through death...and lives again to tell about it! Jesus not only experienced all that death has to offer us; he overcame death, he conquered death, and has been raised to new life. Sound far-fetched and amazing? Listen:

*For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17*

Elizabeth Kubler Ross has written a number of books documenting people's near death experiences. There are common characteristics found running throughout these stories. There is usually some viewing of one's own body as the spirit begins to depart. Sometimes there is the seeing of loved ones left behind. There is often a bright light that attracts the spiritual being, often through a long tunnel. Most of the time people who get beyond the tunnel and light speak of a place of peace, tranquility, warmth...well, it sounds like what? Heaven! In each of those cases the person has returned to his/her body and life, and sometimes regrettably remarks how they didn't want to come back. That's as close as we can come; humanly speaking to know what death is like.

My friends, there is more! We can have a relationship with Jesus Christ who alone has gone through the whole of death, and come out alive. Lazarus may have been resurrected, but he died eventually, his body is buried somewhere. As cool as it is that Enoch and Elijah went straight to heaven, their experience will be of minimal help, because they didn't really die! You see where I'm going? Jesus died a natural physical death. It is well documented. Roman soldiers sealed and guarded his grave site. He alone knows what death is like. More than that...he didn't stay dead! And we'll talk about that next week.

So this is what we need to do. If we are living in the fear of death, we need to get closer to Jesus. I know we can't talk to him like I'm talking to you (except for exceptional people and times). But we can learn of him by reading God's Word, studying his life, getting to know and learning to trust him more completely. I know in my life; death doesn't really scare me. I know I don't understand it, but I also am coming to know more fully everyday, the One who has been there, done that, and lived to tell about it! I'm happy to offer to you this assurance, that we all can live with the One who has already died. That should help. To Overcome the fear of Death:

### 3. LIVE AS ONE WHO HAS ALREADY DIED

Hang on for a minute, this is not misprint. What I'm about to advocate is a choice that each of us can make. Viktor E. Frankl offers that we: "Live as if you were living a second time, and as though you had acted wrongly the first time." Mark Twain suggested that each of us ought to live lives of such exemplary character: "so even the undertaker is sad when we die." That is not exactly what I'm talking about.

There is within the free-will God wired in our DNA the ability to choose...to die before we actually die. I'm not going mad, listen:

*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 Again:*

*Since we have been united with him in death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. Romans 6:5-11 One more:*

*Jesus said to all of them, "If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give up their lives daily to follow me. Luke 9:23*

This is no theological mumble – jumble. I'm speaking of human beings choosing to die. I know this sounds strange, but the experience of accepting God's gift of salvation; the experience of inviting Jesus into our hearts, lives, and wills, the experience of being born again, assumes that there has been a death. When a person chooses to follow Jesus, they automatically cease following some other god...usually them selves. That's why the initiatory experience of following Jesus is often referred to as a "death to self" event. Too many people think being a Christian is simply a matter of attending church, or adding Jesus to their already overcrowded lives. It's not, there has to be a death, because there has been a death!

I want you to know that today; you can make a choice to die to your own life, your own goals, your own wishes, your own dreams, your own desires, your own hopes. Why would I want to do that you ask? Because when you do you'll begin to experience life like you've never known it before...AND you'll eventually notice that the fear of death doesn't have such a grip on you anymore. Dead people don't fear dying...they've already been there and done that! Dead people are the only ones who can truly live without the constrictions of an impending death experience. And lo and behold, when we die to ourselves, and begin living for Jesus; his goals for us become a reality, his wishes for us become manifest, his dreams for our lives take center stage, his hope becomes ours...his life is ours, because we have made his death our own.

It takes a simple act of faith, and a simple choice. Will you this day say yes to Jesus, and no to every other god...even yourself? Then pray with me. (put on screen and pray in unison.)

"God, you know I've lived with the fear of dying for too long. Today, I'm choosing to die to myself, and begin living with, and for, and in you. I pray you'll help me understand about death, what I need to know, and trust you for the unanswered questions. I pray you'll give me assurance that with you in my life, I'll never be alone, either in this life or through the moment of death. And I pray you'll meet me there in the great throne room of our Father, and stand between God and me. I choose to die to myself today, and live for you always. In Jesus name, Amen"

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- 1) People fear death because they \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) Some people fear death because each of us must \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) Some people fear death because they are \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **Steps to Overcome the fear of Death:**

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#### **Action Steps**

1. Spend some time listing the regrets you have with you life to this point.  
Try to separate or categorize them into groups:  
Things I regret that I have done:  
Things I regret that I have not been able to do:  
Things I regret that are my fault:  
Things I regret that are not my fault:  
Etc:  
Prayerfully offer them to God, ask for forgiveness where appropriate, go to individuals and make amends where necessary.
2. Make another list of things you want to accomplish before you die, so you can die with no regrets. Rent and watch The Bucket List if you have not done so, and compose your list into your personal Bucket List.
3. Get a hold of a copy of Laurie Beth Jones little book “The Path”. Read as much of it as possible. But pay special attention to the section dealing with writing a personal mission statement. Do the exercises she recommends to come up with your own personal mission statement.
4. Hold that statement next to whatever spiritual gifts you think God has given to you. How are you using your gifts to fulfill you mission? Are there areas that need correction? Does your mission statement reveal that you might need some more training or practice?
5. Write out your own “spiritual obituary”. How you came to “die to yourself, and begin living for God.” This is your testimony, live it, share it.