

Ending Life's Struggles

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Forward

God has given to us the gift of life. Our children, family, friends, neighbors, and strangers are all gifts. Although some days may be full of hardship and sadness, each breath, heartbeat, and thought illustrates the beautiful gift of life. When a loved one is lost, try to avoid the feeling of being robbed or wronged. Keep the positive memories alive and thank God for the blessings in your past, present, and future.

Revelation 22:17 – Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

The plan God has for you is a path of your own, with God to help, if you choose. Don't compare your path with someone else.

The paths of others may cross or run nearby, but only you can take steps on your path. Only you can choose to see the beauty around your current location and enjoy your journey.

There may be times of deep valleys, but keep looking forward and take it one step at a time.

Psalm 23:4 – Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 16:11 – You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.



Chapter 1



Parable of the rich fool

Luke 12:19-21

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

The rich man in Jesus' story died before he could begin to use what was stored in his big barns. Planning for retirement—preparing for life before death—is wise, but neglecting life after death is disastrous. If you accumulate wealth only to enrich yourself, with no concern for helping others, you will enter eternity empty-handed.

Why do you save money? To retire? To buy more expensive cars or toys? To be secure? Jesus challenges us to think beyond earthbound goals and to use what we have been given for God's kingdom. Faith, service, and obedience are the way to become rich toward God.

What is the hope of the righteous?

Job 27:8

For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?

In the midst of all the accusations, Job was able to declare that his conscience was clear. Only God's forgiveness and the determination to live rightly before God can bring a clear conscience. How important Job's record became as he was being accused.

Like Job, we can't claim sinless lives, but we *can* claim forgiven lives. When we confess our sins to God, he forgives us. Then we can live with clear consciences (1 John 1:9).

Who will gather your riches?

Psalms 39:6

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

The brevity of life is a theme throughout the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Jesus also spoke about it (Luke 12:20). It is ironic that people spend so much time securing their lives on earth and spend little or no thought about where they will spend eternity.

David realized that amassing riches and busily accomplishing worldly tasks would make no difference in eternity. Few people understand that their only hope is in the Lord. (For other verses on the brevity of life, see Eccles. 2:18 and James 4:14.)

To whom will you leave your wealth?

Psalms 49:10

For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.

The rich and poor have one similarity—when they die, they leave all they own here on earth. At the moment of death (and all of us will face that moment), both rich and poor are naked and empty-handed before God. The only riches we have at that time are those we have already invested in our eternal heritage.

At the time of death, each of us will wish we had invested less on earth, where we must leave it, and more in heaven, where we will retain it forever. To have treasure in heaven, we must place our faith in God, pledge ourselves to obey him, and utilize our resources for the good of his kingdom.

This is a good time to check up on your investments and see where you have invested the most. Then do whatever it takes to place your investments where they really count.

Will ill-gotten wealth bring gain?

Proverbs 10:2

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivers from death.

Some people bring unhappiness on themselves by choosing ill-gotten treasures. For example, craving satisfaction, they may do something that destroys their chances of ever achieving happiness.

God's principles for right living bring lasting happiness because they guide us into long-term right behavior in spite of our ever-changing feelings.

Should we boast about tomorrow?

Proverbs 27:1

Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

Don't brag about tomorrow, since you don't know what the day will bring.

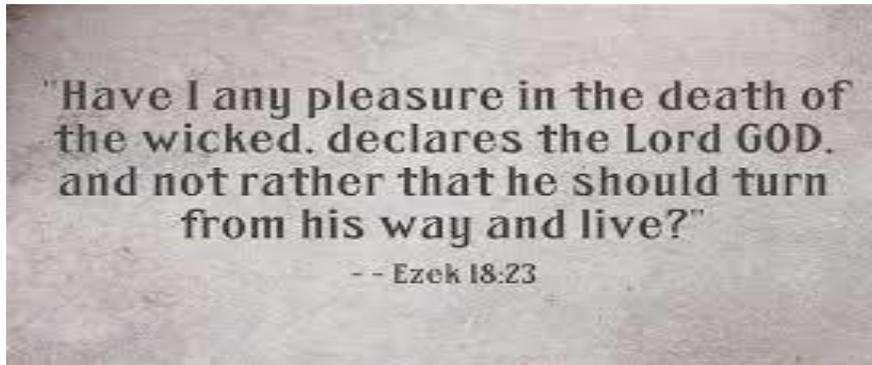
Will tomorrow be like today?

Isaiah 56:12

Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

The “watchmen” were the nation’s leaders. The leaders of Israel were blind to every danger. Apathetic about their people’s needs, they were more concerned about satisfying their own greed. Leadership’s special privileges can cause leaders either to sacrifice for the good of their people or to sacrifice their people for their own greed. If you are in a leadership position, use it for the good of your people.

Chapter 2



Death of the wicked

Numbers 16:32

And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions.

Although the families of Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up, the sons of Korah were not wiped out (see Numbers 26:11).

The death of Absalom

2 Samuel 18:9-10

Now Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. For Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. And his head caught fast in the oak, so he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him kept going. When a certain man saw it, he told Joab and said, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak."

This man had caught Joab in his hypocrisy. He knew Joab would have turned on him for killing the man if the king had found out about it. Joab could not answer, but only dismissed him. Those about to do evil often do not take the time to consider what they are about to do. They don't care whether or not it is right or lawful. Don't rush into action without thinking. Consider whether what you are about to do is right or wrong.

The king was severely wounded in battle.

1 Kings 22:34

Now a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the fight; for I am severely wounded."

Ahab could not escape God's judgment. The king of Aram sent 32 of his best chariot commanders with the sole purpose of killing Ahab.

Thinking he could escape, Ahab tried a disguise, but a random arrow struck him while the chariots chased the wrong king, Jehoshaphat. It was foolish for Ahab to think he could escape by wearing a disguise.

Sometimes people try to escape reality by disguising themselves—changing jobs, moving to a new town, even changing spouses. But God sees and evaluates the motives of each person. Any attempted disguise is futile.

Jezebel was killed.

2 Kings 9:33

He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her under foot.

Jezebel's skull, feet, and hands were all that remained of her evil life—no power, no money, no prestige, no royal finery, no family, no spiritual heritage. In the end, her life of luxury and treachery amounted to nothing. Power, health, and wealth may make you feel as if you can live forever. But death strips everyone of all external security.

The time to set your life's course is now, while you still have time and before your heart becomes hardened. The end will come soon enough.

Haman was killed on his own gallows.

Esther 7:10

So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

Haman's hatred and evil plotting turned against him when the king discovered his true intentions. He was hanged on the gallows he had built for someone else. Proverbs 26:27 teaches that a person who digs a pit for others will fall into it himself. What happened to Haman shows the often violent results of setting any kind of trap for others.

"They covered Haman's face." A veil was placed over the face of someone condemned to death because Persian kings refused to look upon the face of a condemned person.

Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

Daniel 5:30

That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

Darius and his soldiers entered Babylon by diverting the river that ran through the city, then walking in on the dry riverbed.

This Darius is not to be confused with Darius I, mentioned in Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, or Darius II (the Persian), mentioned in Nehemiah. Darius the Mede is named only in the book of Daniel.

Other records name no king between Belshazzar and Cyrus. Thus, Darius may have been (1) appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon as a province of Persia, (2) another name for Cyrus himself or for his son, Cambyses, or (3) a descendant of Xerxes I.

Judas was killed when he hanged himself.

Acts 1:18

(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.

How could someone who had been with Jesus daily betray him? Judas received the same calling and teaching as everyone else. But he chose to reject Christ's warning as well as his offers of mercy. Judas hardened his heart and joined in the plot with Jesus' enemies to put him to death.

Judas remained unrepentant to the end, and he finally committed suicide. Although Jesus predicted this would happen, it was Judas's choice. Those privileged to be *close* to the truth are not necessarily *committed* to the truth. See Judas's Profile for more information on his life. Matthew says that Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5); Acts says that he fell. The traditional explanation is that when Judas hanged himself, the rope or branch broke, Judas fell, and his body burst open.

Ananias fell down and breathed his last.

Acts 5:5

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira produced shock and fear among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the church.

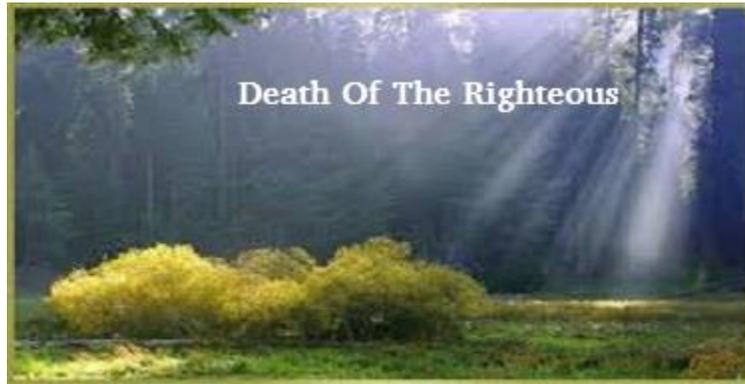
An angel of the Lord struck Herod and he died.

Acts 12:23

And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

Herod died a horrible death accompanied by intense pain; he was literally eaten alive, from the inside out, by worms. To be eaten by worms was considered to be one of the most disgraceful ways to die. Pride is a serious sin, and in this case, God chose to punish it immediately. God does not immediately punish all sin, but he *will* bring all to judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

Chapter 3



Death of the Righteous

Isaiah 57:1

The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; and devout men are taken away, while no one understands for the righteous man is taken away from evil,

For the godly who die will rest in peace.

Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Romans 14:8

For if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Each person is accountable to Christ, not to others. While the church must be uncompromising in its stand against activities that are expressly forbidden by Scripture (adultery, homosexuality, murder, theft), it should not create additional rules and regulations and give them equal standing with God's law. Many times Christians base their moral judgments on opinion, personal dislikes, or cultural bias rather than on the Word of God.

Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.

Revelation 14:13

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

While it is true that money, fame, and belongings can't be taken with us from this life, God's people *can* produce fruit that survives even death. God will remember our love, kindness, and faithfulness, and those who accept Christ through our witness will join us in the new earth.

Be sure that your values are in line with God's values, and decide today to produce fruit that lasts forever.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:8

We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

For those who believe in Christ, death is only a prelude to eternal life with God. We will continue to live. Let this hope give you confidence and inspire you to faithful service.

For me to live is Christ.

Philippians 1:21-23

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

This was not Paul's final imprisonment in Rome. But he didn't know that. Awaiting trial, he knew he could either be released or executed. However, he trusted Christ to work it out for his deliverance. Paul's prayer was that when he stood trial, he would speak courageously for Christ and not be timid or ashamed.

Whether he lived or died, he wanted to exalt Christ. As it turned out, he was released from this imprisonment but arrested again two or three years later. Only faith in Christ could sustain Paul in such adversity.

To those who don't believe in God, life on earth is all there is, and so it is natural for them to strive for this world's values—money, popularity, power, pleasure, and prestige. For Paul, however, to live meant to develop eternal values and to tell others about Christ, who alone could help them see life from an eternal perspective.

Paul's whole purpose in life was to speak out boldly for Christ and to become more like him. Thus Paul could confidently say that dying would be even better than living, because in death he would be removed from worldly troubles, and he would see Christ face to face (1 John 3:2-3).

If you're not ready to die, then you're not ready to live. Make certain of your eternal destiny; then you will be free to serve—devoting your life to what really counts, without fear of death.

God will redeem my soul from hell.

Psalm 49:15

But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will receive me.
Selah.

In the slave market of the ancient world, a slave had to be redeemed or ransomed (someone had to pay the price) in order to go free. In Mark 10:45, Ephes. 1:7, and Hebrews 9:12, we learn that Jesus paid such a price so that we could be set free from slavery to sin in order to begin a new life with him.

There is no way for a person to buy eternal life with God. God alone can redeem a soul. Don't count on wealth and physical comforts to keep you happy because you will never have enough wealth to keep from dying.

Chapter 4



When a believer dies, he enters into rest.

Isaiah 57:2

He enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walked in his upright way.

For the godly who die will rest in peace.

1 Corinthians 15:51

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

We all face limitations. Those who have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities are especially aware of this. Some may be blind, but they can see a new way to live. Some may be deaf, but they can hear God's Good News. Some may be lame, but they can walk in God's love.

In addition, they have the encouragement that those disabilities are only temporary. Paul tells us that we all will be given new bodies when Christ returns and that these bodies will be without disabilities, never to die or become sick. This can give us hope in our suffering.

“We will not all sleep” means that Christians alive at that day will not have to die but will be transformed immediately. A trumpet blast will usher in the new heaven and earth. The Jews would understand the significance of this because trumpets were always blown to signal the start of great festivals and other extraordinary events (Numbers 10:10).

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

Psalm 116:15

Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones.

God stays close to us even in death. When someone we love is nearing death, we may become angry and feel abandoned. But believers (saints) are precious to God, and he carefully chooses the time when they will be called into his presence.

Let this truth provide comfort when you've lost a loved one. God sees, and each life is valuable to him (see Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:29).

Paul finished his course.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

As he neared the end of his life, Paul could confidently say he had been faithful to his call. Thus he faced death calmly, knowing that he would be rewarded by Christ. Is your life preparing you for death? Do you share Paul's confident expectation of meeting Christ? The good news is that the heavenly reward is not just for giants of the faith, like Paul, but for all who are eagerly looking forward to Jesus' second coming. Paul gave these words to encourage Timothy, and us, that no matter how difficult the fight seems—keep fighting. When we are with Jesus Christ, we will discover that it was all worth it.

A drink offering consisted of wine poured out on an altar as a sacrifice to God (see Genesis 35:14; Exodus 29:41). Its fragrance was considered pleasing to God. Paul viewed his life as an offering to God.

In Roman athletic games, a laurel wreath was given to the winners. A symbol of triumph and honor, it was the most coveted prize in ancient Rome.

This is probably what Paul was referring to when he spoke of a “crown.” But his would be a crown of righteousness. See 2 Cor. 5:10 and the note on +Matthew 19:27 for more on the rewards awaiting us for our faith and deeds. Although Paul would not receive an earthly reward, he would be rewarded in heaven. Whatever we may face—discouragement, persecution, or death—we know our reward is with Christ in heaven.

Laying aside our deathly dwelling is imminent.

2 Peter 1:14

Knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

Peter knew that he would die soon. Many years before, Christ had prepared Peter for the kind of death Peter would face (see John 21:18-19). At this time, Peter knew that his death was at hand. Peter was martyred for the faith in about A.D. 68.

According to one tradition, he was crucified upside down, at his own request, because he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Master.

Our spirit returns to God when we die.

Psalm 31:5

Into Your hand I commit my spirit; you have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.

We say we have faith in God, but do we really trust him? David’s words, “Into your hands I commit my spirit,” convey his complete trust in God. Jesus used this phrase as he was dying on the cross—showing his absolute dependence on God the Father (Luke 23:46).

Stephen repeated these words as he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:59), confident that in death he was simply passing from God’s earthly care to God’s eternal care. We should commit our possessions, our families, and our vocations to God. But first and foremost, we should commit *ourselves* completely to him.

The Lord received the spirit of Stephen.

Acts 7:59

They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

The penalty for blasphemy, speaking irreverently about God, was death by stoning (Leviticus 24:14). The religious leaders, who were furious, had Stephen stoned without a trial. They did not understand that Stephen's words were true, because they were not seeking the truth. They only wanted support for their own views.

God received the spirit of Jesus.

Luke 23:46

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last.

This significant event symbolized Christ's work on the cross. The temple had three parts: the courts for all the people; the Holy Place, where only priests could enter; and the Most Holy Place, where the high priest alone could enter once a year to atone for the sins of the people. It was in the Most Holy Place that the ark of the covenant, and God's presence with it, rested.

The curtain that was torn was the one that closed off the Most Holy Place from view. At Christ's death, the barrier between God and man was split in two. Now all people can approach God directly through Christ (Hebrews 9:1-14; Hebrews 10:19-22).

You will enter into rest and rise again.

Daniel 12:13

"But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age."

The promise of resurrection was reaffirmed to Daniel. He would one day see the fulfillment of his words, but he was not to spend the rest of his life wondering what his visions might mean.

Instead, he was to rest in the comfort of God's sovereignty and look forward to the time when he would rise to receive and share eternal life with God. God does not reveal everything to us in this life. We must be content with the partial picture until he wants us to see more. He will tell us all we need to know.

Daniel stands tall in the gallery of God's remarkable servants. Born of royal heritage, yet taken into captivity when only a teenager, Daniel determined to remain faithful to God in the land of his captivity. Even at great personal cost, Daniel spent his entire lifetime advising his captors with unusual wisdom. God chose him as his servant to record some of the events of the captivity and some significant events concerning the future.

As an old man, having been faithful to God throughout his years, Daniel was assured by God that he would rise from the dead and receive his portion in God's eternal kingdom. Faithfulness to God has a rich reward, not necessarily in this life, but most certainly in the life to come.

When our earthly building is torn down, we have building from God.

2 Corinthians 5:1-3

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

Paul contrasts our earthly bodies ("earthly tent") and our future resurrection bodies ("a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands"). Paul clearly states that our present bodies make us groan, but when we die we will not be spirits without bodies ("be found naked"). We will have new bodies that will be perfect for our everlasting life.

Paul wrote as he did because the church at Corinth was in the heart of Greek culture, and many believers had difficulty with the concept of bodily resurrection. Greeks did not believe in a bodily resurrection. Most saw the afterlife as something that happened only to the soul, with the real person imprisoned in a physical body. They believed that at death the soul is released—there is no immortality for the body, and the soul enters an eternal state. But the Bible teaches that the body and soul are not permanently separated.

Paul describes our resurrected bodies in more detail in 1 Cor. 15:46-58. We will still have personalities and recognizable characteristics in our resurrected bodies, but through Christ's work, our bodies will be better than we can imagine. The Bible does not tell us everything about our resurrected bodies, but we know they will be perfect, without sickness, disease, or pain (see Phil. 3:21; Rev. 21:4).

What is your choice?

Choose you today whom you will serve?

Joshua 24:15

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

The people had to decide whether they would obey the Lord, who had proven his trustworthiness, or obey the local gods, which were only man-made idols. It's easy to slip into a quiet rebellion—going about life in your own way. But the time comes when you have to choose who or what will control you.

The choice is yours. Will it be God, your own limited personality, or another imperfect substitute? Once you have chosen to be controlled by God's Spirit, reaffirm your choice every day.

In taking a definite stand for the Lord, Joshua again displayed his spiritual leadership. Regardless of what others decided, Joshua had made a commitment to God, and he was willing to set the example of living by that decision. The way we live shows others the strength of our commitment to serving God.

God is knocking at your hearts door.



Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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