

DYING TO LIVE, Part 1

Staying Alive, Staying Alive

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Our longing to live and experience life to the fullest corresponds to God's aim to give us life — abundant and eternal. What all people must ultimately discover is that God is not only the Source of Life, He is Life itself ("whom to know is eternal life").

Thrill-seekers and dare-devils may seem like they are courting death, but usually it is not a death-wish that drives them, but a craving for the most that life can give, which they seem to find only at that precipitous edge, just millimeters this side of the swath of the Grim Reaper's blade.

"Ask any shark diver why they do it and the answer is quick and simple — the thrill. From Cape Town to California, Florida and the Bahamas, adventurous divers can slip into the ocean with an experienced guide to observe some of the world's fiercest predators.

"But some say the search for a thrill has gone too far: baiting the water with bloody fish parts and getting face-to-face to the most aggressive species without cages or protective gear. An Austrian tourist on this kind of dive was fatally bitten by a shark this week." (Associated Press, West Palm Beach, FL)

Even more than we fear death, we crave life. That is why we can usually endure struggle better than boredom. It is as deep as our powerful instinct to survive against all odds. Even when we are miserable, we usually prefer living to the alternative.

We are all about how to squeeze more gusto out of life and stretch it out for as many years as possible. Medical science has become a life-sustaining industry, that now forces us up against uncomfortable questions, like "What constitutes quality of life?"

In fact, some organizations exist today for the sole purpose of discovering means of defeating the inevitability of death, while others pursue technologies of preserving human bodies (cryonics) in the hope that physical life might one day be restored, long after death has occurred.

The Good News is that our preoccupation with living to the fullest is complemented by God's express desire that we might "have life, and have it to the full."

God Himself is known as the "Giver of Life" and the "Lord of Life" and the "Lord of all who live." It was He, in the beginning, who "breathed the breath of life into man's nostrils" and made him a living person (Genesis 2:7).

He made us for, and redeemed us for, abundant and everlasting life!

Here are several passages from the Psalms that affirm that...

Psalms 103:2 Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. ³ He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. ⁴ He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. ⁵ He fills my life with good things.

Psalm 91:14 The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. ¹⁵ When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. ¹⁶ I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation."

Psalm 16:11 You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

This Life is not simply something everyone has. According to the Bible, many people who are alive today, do not have *this kind* of life. This is the kind of life that God Himself knows and enjoys. At the same time, the Bible affirms that *everyone may* have this kind of life, it is a free gift from God for the asking.

But there is one catch... asking off the cuff with a flippant indifference, like, "Oh, cool. Okay, give me life. Whatever." does not get the prize.

In the beginning, God gave this gift before it was even requested. But our forefathers (Adam and Eve) did not really prize what they had been given and they traded it away for less valuable commodities.

In order to recover the gift of Life and secure it for future generations, God paid an awful price — a high price, a personal price:

"God loved the world so much that he gave (up) His one and only Son" (John 3:16), that is, Jesus Christ loved us and gave Himself for us in death on the cross (Galatians 2:20).

To receive the gift, you must value the gift; you must recognize that it was a gift of truest love, of most generous love, of most personal love. And then humbly ask.

You need not persuade God of your need or desire (He already knows it well), but you yourself must be persuaded of your need and desire. God gives His life to those who truly want it.

Matthew 19:18 Someone came to Jesus with this question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

¹⁷ *"Why ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments."*

¹⁸ *"Which ones?" the man asked.*

And Jesus replied: " 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

²⁰ *"I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?"*

²¹ *Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

²² *But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*

Why did he go away? Because he valued his possessions more; he could not let them go. And he was sad, but only that he could not have life on top of all that he possessed.

We may possess things, but eventually, things possess us. The more we treasure them, the more we will pay to secure them. Sometimes, it is not their innate value that possesses us, but the memory of the effort expended to acquire them. Other times, it is simply their familiarity; we're so accustomed to having them around, we can no longer imagine life without them.

Do you realize that Jesus was more sad about this turn of events, than the man who turned away? What a poor trade the man made.

Upon reading Scripture, Missionary Jim Elliott reflected and wrote in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

John recorded some of the words of Jesus on this subject:

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

John 6:35 I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 4:14 Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

John 10:10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give a rich and satisfying life.

John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

From these words, we may begin to see that this life — this God-life, this full life — has just one source (not many). And, it is a source outside of ourselves. We must eat it, we must drink it, we must take it in and make it part of who we are.

The source of this abundant and everlasting life is Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

John 5:26 The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son.

John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

Romans 6:23 The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is not simply a one-time, perhaps now long-past transaction. This life is an on-going flow, like an artesian well or a great river. We may drink from it daily. We may bathe in its waters. We may swim in its current.

Romans 8:11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Romans 8:2 And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

When God gives us life, He gives us His own Spirit. And He, the Holy Spirit, is known as the "life-giving Spirit." That ever-flowing well, that never-ending river, is the life-giving Spirit whom God puts inside the one who sincerely asks God for new life. He moves in, takes up residence, and He comes to stay.

John 7:37 Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me!"³⁸ Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.' "

¹ John 5:11 And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.

Life is not without meaning; your life has divine purpose! And its purpose goes far beyond acquiring knowledge or wealth or experience. The greatest thrill in the universe is to engage Jesus Christ as your Adventure Guide and ride with Him each day.