

There is a challenge before us in thinking hopefully about death. We want to avoid being fake, self-deceived, and Pollyanna-ish. The world often looks at Christians and agrees with Marx, that religion is the opiate of the masses, or, in other words, just a way of deluding ourselves with pie-in-the-sky false optimism because, like Lt. Daniel Kaffee, we can't handle the truth. We also want to avoid the opposite problem, of being dour or even coming to celebrate death. So what do we do? I think we look deeply into the suffering and tragedy that is both life and death, and also look at the redemption of these things that God intends through faith. Let's look at some of the problems that we face in life, and how God uses death to bring in the remedy to these problems, so that we don't celebrate death, but the life that God makes available to us after death.

Day 1

Loss of Health

When I was younger, perhaps less than 40, I would often listen to the laments of older people with one ear closed. I would hear their complaints about all their health issues, but would let it go in one ear and out the other. It just didn't have much relevance to me, and was not something I could even really understand on an experiential level. Now that I'm older, I listen closely because I know that the path before me is the one that they are describing to me. When we think about loss of health, we often think about suffering because that is the prime component that gets our attention. This suffering can produce a type of myopic focus on the self, and it can lead to bitterness and depression. The loss of health is bigger than suffering, however, and really has its roots in the inability of various parts of the body to integrate and serve the body as a whole. The lungs can no longer feed oxygen to the blood, the heart can no longer pump the blood throughout the body. All of the parts start to fail in their service to the body. In the same way, spiritual health is the ability to serve others in an appropriate and fruitful way, and our fragile and failing health makes that truly difficult as more time, energy, and focus must be given to the functioning of the body. God wants to give us a new, imperishable body, and that will be a glorious thing for many reasons, including the fact that we will be free from the need to worry or take concern over our own health, but can instead focus on serving the body of Christ. This outward focus, difficult to achieve in our fragile and corrupt earthly bodies, will come naturally to us when we have been raised in glory. Let's look forward today to the time when our health will no longer concern us, but the good of others will fully occupy our minds and hearts.

Verses: Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Timothy 4:8

Prayer Topics: New Body, Hope, Glory

Day 2

Loss of Loved Ones

One of the most difficult parts of life for all people is the loss of those they love. Someone who has been close to you for 50 or even 70 years is now gone, and there is a giant hole left in their absence which is like a piece of one's own self is gone. What often makes the grief harder to bear is that one cannot even hope for its absence, because it is the last thing that is left of the other person so that loss is the only experience of the other person that can be contemplated. What does this grief tell us about our God and the life he desires for us? We were made for a community that has a depth only hinted at in our present, corrupted human lives. We only get glimpses of it here and there, because we as people so often choose self over community, bringing pain and distance into our relationships. We do very well if we can experience true closeness with just one or two others in our life, but God has made us to live in deep and abiding community with both Him and the host of heaven. We have inherited Adam's

proclivity to sin, and that sin corrupts all our efforts at true community, but God desires us to live life to the full in true, covenantal community. God will judge sin, and he will put things right, and that equals death to all things that keep us from the glory He desires for us. Death, and the judgment that comes with it, is the gateway to living in true close community with God and others, and our experience of loss in this world is a hint at what we were meant for. When we experience loss, we should know that it is a hunger for a better world, one that God wants us to inhabit. Let's look forward to true community.

Verses: Hebrews 11:16, Revelation 21:4, Revelation 22:1-5

Prayer Topics: Reuniting, Community, Faith

Day 3

Loss of Youth

Looking back at childhood, I would never want to go back. The hard-won lessons of experience, the price that was paid for wisdom, makes getting older much preferable to going back to our youth. Having said that though, there are certain aspects of youth that have great charm, as seen by the fact that people in nursing homes are never content with talking to each other, but crave to spend some time with someone younger. The energy, joy, and enthusiasm of youth are contagious and greatly enjoyable, as any parent knows. Watching your child embrace the joy of Christmas morning is one of the great moments in life, and most parents hold on to those memories dearly. As we age, we know we have gained great wisdom, but at the price of the vitality of youth. What does this loss tell us about the life God desires for us? C.S. Lewis said that God was at once far older and far younger than we are, because He can take great joy and enthusiasm in something like a sunrise, where we have grown weary of it. Our bodies, and our minds, grow old. We lose the energy to truly enjoy the things that are worthy of our enjoyment. God wants to give us bodies that never age, that never run out of the energy to enjoy the gifts that he has given us. How great to have the wisdom to know what has true value, and the energy to really enjoy it. In our lives on this earth, we are stuck in a place of having one or the other, but in the life God desires for us, the life after death, he will give us both.

Verses: Ecclesiastes 11:9, Ephesians 4:14-15, 1 Corinthians 13:11

Prayer Topics: Innocence, Excitement, Maturity

Day 4

Loss of Independence

When I visit older people, one of the great laments that they have is their loss of independence. It is one of the things that makes aging so difficult, as one is forced to re-experience one of the real indignities of youth, without the compensating virtues. To have gone through the suffering of gaining real wisdom and experience, and then to have to be dependent and have decisions made for us by those that have not gone through those experiences seems to be almost too much for many. What does this loss teach us about the life God desires for us? God wants us to be prophets, priests, and kings. God desires us to rule with Him, even to judge angels. But the road to leadership goes through the dark valley of humility and even death. In order to have real wisdom, we must have experienced both the ups and the downs, we must have gone through all that life has to offer, even death. We experience the loss of independence just when we have the most wisdom and experience, just as Jesus experienced being a king, but being treated as something much less. If we were to choose a leader, we would not want someone un-acquainted with adversity, who had grown up with a silver spoon, never knowing want, need, or injustice. Jesus was seated at the right hand of the father in glory after experiencing captivity,

trial, and death as a common criminal. If we want to rule with Him, we must walk the path he walked. Then we will be able to judge competently, and rule in His image. The cross comes before the crown. As we experience the cross, let us focus on the glory of the crown, and how God wants us to experience it with Christ.

Verses: John 15:5, Philippians 3:12, Isaiah 46:4

Prayer Topics: Change, Humility, Wisdom

Day 5

Loss of Usefulness

One loss we will inevitably experience in life, if we live long enough, is a loss of usefulness. We will retire from our jobs, technology will move on, and we will lose expertise in the world around us. Our ability to understand and act in the world effectively will eventually decline, and this will be very difficult for many to live with. What does this teach us about the life God desires to give us after death? Nothing is so precious and meaningful as that which has been absent. God desires us to live in community, to be priest and king, to play a meaningful part in His kingdom as we image and reflect Him. How glorious that will seem after a season without it. Many times, in our lives now, we are wearied by the demands placed on our time and effort. There is always more need for help than ability to help. We can find ourselves being bitter and resentful of all of the requests for help that we face on a regular basis, and that is rooted in our sinful attitudes and the weakness of our bodies. How great it will be to “wake up” refreshed, with a new body, a transformed spirit, and an experience of just how great it is to be needed, and to be able to act in the world to meet those needs. God wants to give us a life that is far more glorious than we can imagine, but we can still reach out with our imaginations and get a glimpse of the life He desires for us. In all of the loss we experience in life, there is a message of hope in seeing the kind of life God desires for us. As Christians, we do not celebrate death, but life to the full. That life is only available to us beyond the death of this life, and so we are not dismayed by death, but hopeful as we face it.

Verses: John 14:2, John 11:25-26, 2 Corinthians 5:8

Prayer Topics: Receiving, Decline, Position