
Walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death Part II

By Dr. Stephen Hurd

Overview

- Brief review
 - Relevancy in our culture
 - Sheol as a picture of dying and death
 - Origin of death
 - The curse of death
 - The “good” in death?
 - Practical applications
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3 Psalms

- 6- Lament
- 16- Hope
- 23- Durabilty



Transhumanism

- From WSJ April 27, 2024
 - “Harvard geneticist David Sinclair, who said his “biologic age” is roughly a decade younger than his actual one, has put forward his largely unlined face as a spokesman for the longevity movement. The 54 year old has built his brand on the idea that aging is a treatable disease. The notion has proven so seductive that legions of acolytes follow his online postings about his research and the cocktails of supplements he consumes to stave off the inevitable”. There is resistance from the scientific community. “One scientist who quit (Sinclair’s Academy for Health and Lifespan Research) referred to Sinclair on X as a “snake oil salesman.”
 - Out of J. Todd Billings book The End of the Christian Life- He quotes Chief Science Officer Aubrey de Gray with SENS, “What I am after is not living to 1000. I’m after letting people avoid death as long as they want to.”
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Sheol

- Not only is it a dark place for the dead, but it is a place of the Lord's apparent absence and abandonment, the opposite of the temple. We see this in Jonah 2:2, where Jonah cries out to God from the belly of the fish, for deliverance. Perhaps, Christ also expresses this place as he cries out, from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)
 - Both death and Sheol show us that we are rather helpless and impotent and even our greatest accomplishments are rather small, mortal, and finite.
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Origin of Death in Scripture

- Genesis 1-3
 - 2:16-7 And the LORD God commanded man saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.
 - 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman...
 - 3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.
 - 3:22-3 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take from the tree of life, and live forever- therefore the LORD God sent him out from the Garden of Eden...
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Death as the enemy

I Cor 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

I Cor 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned ---

Slavery to the fear of death

- Hebrews 2:14-15 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.
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What is “good
about death?”

“Good” things about death

- 1) It can teach us about life, God, and ourselves. It can be part of our creaturely growth. One author wrote “blessed are those that seek the temple from the pit.”
 - 2) It can help us realize how small and fragile we really are and show us our dependency on God, our creator. Psalm 90 asks the Lord to “teach us to number our days that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.”
 - 3) Because there is a strong element of the unknown, it points us to our need of a mediator to walk us through this door. It is even better that this mediator has tasted death on our behalf.
 - 4) Since we tend to repress or ignore things that we do not like or understand, or that we fear, death brings us to the reality of who we are within God’s creation.
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The process of aging and dying- the repression of death and dying in our culture

- 1) the glorification of youth, external beauty, and sexuality in our culture
 - 2) the denial of death and dying expressed in our care for the aged, our funerals, popular culture, and the way we teach our young about mortality
 - 3) the transhumanist movement
 - 4) the western medical establishment's emphasis on cure from care in the attempt to deny death
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Martin Luther said in regards to death and dying:

- We should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move.
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So what? Some practical applications

1) Engage in more prayer and contemplation

2) Helping and coming alongside those that are suffering or dying

3) Handing off our faith, especially to a younger generation

4) Read scripture, especially Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, Jonah, John, and Hebrews

5) Focus on giving back to God and giving to others- enjoy life by sharing

6) Practice gratitude- count your blessings

7) Don't be afraid of creative newness

8) Simplify life and detach yourself from unnecessary worldly goods

Additional Sources for Your Consideration

- **Billings**, J. Todd, The End of the Christian Life – How Embracing Our Mortality Frees Us to Truly Live – He is a professor at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan. He is also a cancer survivor. He writes a very good, culturally relevant treatment of death and dying.
 - **Duncan**, Ligon, Fear Not! Death and Afterlife from a Christian Perspective – Duncan is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church (PCA), Jackson, Mississippi, and is quite active in our denomination. This is a rather short and approachable treatment on the topic of death. It is a good summary of our reformed position.
 - **Gibson**, David, Living Life Backwards – How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End – Gibson is minister of Trinity Church in Aberdeen, Scotland, and presents this topic from the point of view of the Preacher, the writer of Ecclesiastes. This is more of a pastoral treatment of death, yet completely biblically based. It is very practical, yet deeply insightful.
 - **Keller**, Tim, On Death – This is a rather short primer on the topic, but it well covers the large questions.
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Additional Sources for Your Consideration

- **Kugel**, James L., In the Valley of the Shadow – On the Foundations of Religious Belief – Kugel is a Jewish OT scholar who teaches at Harvard and in Israel. He is also a cancer survivor. Very good and personal book that reaches across religious traditions.
 - **Ridenour**, Autumn Alcott, Sabbath Rest as Vocation – Aging Toward Death – She is a professor at Merrimack College and writes a rather theologically-based treatment of death and dying. She particularly looks at the topic through her understanding of both Augustine and Barth. Excellent scholarly work.
 - **Spurgeon**, Charles H., O Death, Where is Your Sting? – Classic Sermons on Dying in Christ and Our Heavenly Hope – This a collection of six sermons given by the great reformed Baptist preacher in the 1800s. Great and classic treatment on this topic.
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