

# G P S

## For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

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### The Stewardship of Dying

December marks the end of the year. It is the dying of the seasons, the lengthening of the night, the shortening of the days. Just as God has made His world “for signs and seasons, for days and years,” He has made human beings to live and to die. Life came by the creative hand of God, death came by the sin of mankind. By God’s grace, however, “death is swallowed up in victory” by faith in Jesus Christ. I want to end this twelve-month series speaking of death for the believer. That may sound odd for a December article but it is fitting for the end of the life cycle about which I have been writing.

Just as winter brings an expected end to the seasons, spring always follows with new life. The death of the believer brings an end to earthly life, but it brings the beginning of eternal life with God. I believe Christians ought to look forward to this transition we call death. This is not to say that death itself is enjoyable or easy, but it is to say that we are “earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.” Given a choice between the two, I would choose “having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better.” The Puritan William Bridge said, “Death is terrible. It is called the king of terrors. But to sweeten this, it is called sleep.” So let me give a few biblical facts that sweeten this thing we call death.

Facts about death. First, we should understand that death is not a punishment for the believer, it is just the last debt we owe to our human existence. Jesus has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light” for the believer even though “it is appointed unto man once to die.” Thomas Wentworth, at his death sentence said, “I come to pay the last debt I owe unto sin, which is death, and by the blessing of God, to rise

again through the merits of Christ Jesus to eternal glory.” Second, death does not separate us from our union with Christ. “The dead in Christ will rise,” and “so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Third, dying is the culmination of our progressive sanctification. This is perhaps the greatest opportunity for Christian testimony in our life. The words of great saints become more pointed and effective as they approach death, and their memorial brings many tears to doubting eyes. “The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell below” (Prov. 15:24).

Analogies about death. There are well over twenty analogies of the process of dying. The more common ones are: going to sleep and waking (1 Thes. 4:13; Psalms 17:15); folding a tent and putting it away (2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:14); sowing a seed that produces a new form (John 12:24; 1 Cor. 15:38); a ship departing from its moorings (2 Tim. 4:6; Phil. 1:23); flying away (Psalms 90:10).

Testimonies about death. Believers have always been encouraged by the testimonies from great saints as they were entering the valley of the shadow of death. Philip Doddridge influenced great men such as Isaac Watts and C.H. Spurgeon who referred to his book as “That holy book.” Doddridge wrote, “I acknowledge, O Lord, the justice of that sentence by which I am expiring; and own thy wisdom and goodness in appointing my journey through this gloomy vale which is now before me. Help me to turn it into the happy occasion of honoring thee and adorning my profession! And I will bless the pangs by which thou art glorified, and this mortal and sinful part of my nature dissolved. . . let me close the scene nobly.” *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, p. 319.

## Other observations on Dying

Richard Baxter: "The thing to be considered is our unreasonable unwillingness to die, that we may possess the saints' rest. We linger, like Lot in Sodom, till 'the Lord being merciful unto us,' doth pluck us away against our will. I confess that death, of itself, is not desirable; but the soul's rest with God is, to which death is the common passage." *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, p. 241.

C.H. Spurgeon: "O Lord, let them not die without hope, and may thy believing people learn to pass away without even tasting the bitterness of death. May they enter into rest, each one walking in his own uprightness." *Spurgeon's Prayers*, p. 114.

Matthew Henry: "If it be the will of God that I should finish my course this year, let me be found of Christ in peace, and by the grace of God death shall be welcome to me." *Biography of Matthew Henry*, p. 112.

Gregory Spencer: "The Black Plague. Brutal war. High infant mortality. No antibiotics. Perhaps because death seemed to walk constantly with those in the Middle Ages, the church thought that believers needed to prepare to meet their Savior, to learn to 'let go' of this life and die with grace. They called this practice *ars morendi*, Latin for 'the art of dying well.'" *Awakening the Quieter Virtues*, p. 150.

J.C. Ryle: "Most men hope to go to heaven when they die; but few, it may be feared, take the trouble to consider whether they would enjoy heaven if they got there. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy; its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear and plain that we must be somewhat trained and made ready for heaven while we are on earth." *Holiness*, p. 58-59.

A.W. Tozer: "I thank God that heaven is the world of God's obedient children. Whatever else we may say of its pearly gates, golden streets and jasper walls, heaven is heaven because children of the Most High God find they are in their normal sphere as obedient moral beings." *Mornings With Tozer*,

Robert Freeman: "When I go down to the sea by ship, and death unfurls her sail, weep not for me, for there shall be, a living host on another coast, to beckon and cry, All hail." WWII Memorial, Alaska.

## A Dialogue—Anthem, By George Herbert (1593-1633)

Alas, poor Death! Where is thy glory?  
Where is thy famous force, thy ancient sting?

Alas, poor mortal, void of story!  
Go spell and read how I have killed thy King.

Poor Death! And who was hurt thereby?  
Thy curse being laid on Him makes thee accurst.

Let losers talk, yet thou shalt die;  
These arms shall crush thee.

Spare not, do thy worst.  
I shall be one day better than before;  
Thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more.

From *The Temple*, 1633, by George Herbert.  
<https://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Dialogue.html>

## The Great Concern, Edward Pearce (1633-1673)

"Truly, this is the posture which some (though but a few) are found in; they make conscience to discharge the duty that is incumbent upon them; they say with their Lord, 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work' (John 9:4). They see night coming, death coming, judgment coming, eternity coming, and accordingly they desire to lay out their whole souls in the work of God, to live up to the laws of Christ in every relation, and they look upon that day as lost wherein they have not done somewhat for God and their own souls. And how comfortably may such look death in the face when it comes! I have read the life of a holy minister who was seized upon by sickness, which was unto death, while he was preaching the everlasting gospel, and lying sick a few days sick before he died, a fellow laborer of his, another holy minister, coming to visit him, and seeing death in his face, cried out in some passion, 'O dear sir, are you going to heaven from us?' To whom he replied, 'Yes, I bless God, that my Master found me in his work.' Truly, might a man have his choice and option, he would have death to find him while he is engaged in the work of God." *The Great Concern: Preparation for Death*, p. 102.