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Two Dynamic Forces

Life and death are two powerful forces operating right within us, in our hearts, and in the world around us. Much of the time, however, we are ignorant of them. Our journey to maturity involves learning to recognize the differences between life and death so we can choose more of the things that bring us life: choices about our thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and actions.

- I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that *I have set before you life and death*, the blessing and the curse. *So choose life in order that you may live*, you and your descendants ... for *this your life and the length of your days*, that you may live (Deut 30:19-20) [emphasis mine].
- You shall also say to this people, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death”’ (Jer 21:8).

Differences between them

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, “The Big Questions of Life,” God says his people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Many people are simply ignorant or unable to recognize the differences between these two dynamic forces.

When they want to make simple decisions – or especially life-changing ones – they find it very difficult to decide. They do not know whether they should get a different job, marry or divorce, change churches, join a certain group, move to a different place, get the vaccine, or even eat certain foods – so they stay stuck or filled with fear.

Fixidity is death; a person who is fixed (*firmly set in the role s/he plays*) is depriving her/himself of life and liberty. – Dr. Paul Tournier¹

Making choices

For example, we make choices every day about what to do with our time. Right now, I could read facebook, play a game on my computer, work on my scrapbook or write this book. It is not a difficult choice for me, because I know which one will give me more life at this moment, causing me to feel more alive and satisfied when my day has ended.

¹ Dr. Paul Tournier (1898–1986): A Swiss physician and author who acquired a worldwide audience for his work in pastoral counseling. His ideas had a significant impact on the spiritual and psychosocial aspects of patient care. He has been called the twentieth century's most famous Christian physician. He authored more than 30 books including *The Healing of Persons*, *The Meaning of Persons*, *The Adventure of Living*, *Creative Suffering*, etc.

Some years ago, when we were moving to Germany, I needed to get rid of many of our belongings. As most of you know, it is not an easy job. To help me make a choice on each item, I looked at it and asked myself: *Does it still bring life to me, or does it hold only sentimental memories from the past?* There is a difference between sentimental memories and life-giving memories: one pulls us back into the past, and the other gives us energy for the future.

Recognizing the basic differences between life and death makes our choices easier. We can more easily recognize when we are offended or hurt, when something feels wrong, or when something is dead – no longer has any life it in – so we can make choices about what we need to do in each situation. Also, we can recognize when something we are thinking about or something we are doing brings us life, causes us to feel satisfied at the end of our day.

One of my difficult tasks is to keep my mind set on God's higher thoughts, not the lower ones from my fallen nature. I have much better days when I do that. We are able to choose the thoughts that bring us life – if we are aware and can recognize them.

- ... Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts (Is 65:2)

Sometimes my husband and I will watch a movie, and when it is finished, we say to each other that it was not a good choice; it did not leave us feeling satisfied. Perhaps it even had opened us up to the kingdom of darkness.

Last evening as I listened to Rev. Kenneth E. Hagin,² I noticed my inner being relax. I began to yawn and let go of the oppressive heaviness caused by my negative thinking and life reactions. Why? Why does this happen? What caused it?

↳ ***My question is: Do you know the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness?***

What Is Life?

I want you to think about what it means when we talk about *life*. I will start with definitions because they provide us a basis for our understanding. We will first consider the characteristics of death, then in the next Chapter, we will look at the characteristics of life.

I won't apologize for sometimes using an academic approach. At age 65, I went back to the university, studied social work, and earned a master's degree. I really loved doing it – the studying, the research, and especially writing the many papers.

Just now, I realized it was another wonderful adventure I had taken in life. I sat in classes with people young enough to be my grandchildren. They probably thought I was a crazy old woman; perhaps I was, but it certainly brought me life!

² Rev. Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003) is known as the "apostle of the Word of Faith movement." A dynamic preacher, teacher, and prophet, his teachings were filled with vivid stories that show God's power and truth working in his life and the lives of others. (YouTube Video, "We Are the Garden of God.")

So now let's pay attention to these definitions! Identify the key differences between them.

Defining life

Biblical definitions

As I said in Chapter 5, "Life, God's Desire for You," in the New Testament the Greek word for "life," *zoe*, simply means *life as a principle*, i.e., the state of possessing the property of life: vigor, liveliness, animate, vivacious; source of vigor, or liveliness. In the absolute sense, life as God has it—*his uncreated life!*

- I came that they might have life [*zoe*], and might have it abundantly (John 10:10).

In the Old Testament, the word "life" is translated from *chay*, meaning *alive*, i.e., fresh, strong. Its root means to live, whether literally or figuratively, i.e., to revive, give life, nourish us; to restore to life.

- God who holds our soul in life [*chay*] (Ps. 66:9).

Dictionary definitions

Here are a few dictionary definitions of "life" that will help you better understand what *life* is: notice words like source, force, quality, and energy.

↪ *Which of these definitions do you prefer?*

- The source of vigor or liveliness.
- The quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body.
- A principle or force that is considered to underlie the distinctive quality of animate beings.
- An animating and shaping force or principle—spirit.
- The state characterized by the ability to get and use energy, reproduce, grow, and respond to change.

Other words for life include animation, ardor, buoyancy, enthusiasm, exuberance, fervency, glow, liveliness, passion, sparkle, spirit, vigor, vitality, vivacity, zest, and zeal.

↪ *So how would you explain what "life" is?*

Do you like this description?

Life is an animating force or spirit that flows within us; it relies on renewable energy in order to continue to develop and express itself, like sap does for the tree.

Life involves a will, a consciousness, a choice – Dr. Paul Tournier

What Is Death?

Now let's consider the opposite: death. I realize this seems elementary, but stay with me. Look closely at the definitions. What are the primary characteristics of one who is dead?

Here are some Scriptures that relate to death

- But the dead know not anything (Eccl 9:5).
- Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness (Job 38: 17)?
- For many are the mortally wounded she has cast down ... descending to the chambers of death (Prov 7: 26-27).
- The cords of death encompassed me ... the snares of death confronted me (Ps. 18:4-5).
- For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23).

Defining death

Biblical definitions

Both the Hebrew (*maveth*) and Greek (*thanatos*) words for death, mean exactly that, i.e., to die literally or figuratively.

In Ezekiel 37, it talks about the valley of dry bones. Generally, bones are a symbol of life, but dry bones refer to bones that have lost the life that was once in them. In other words, they were dead.

- He set me down in the middle of the valley, and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley and lo, they were very dry ... Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' "Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life'" (Ezek 37:1-5).
- The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned (Matt 4:16).

Dictionary definitions

- Permanent cessation of life in which all vital functions cease permanently.
- Any ending resembling death; total extinction; destruction.
- Any condition thought of as like dying or being dead.
- Fixated, rigid; set, immovable; devoid of all life.

Other words for dead include: comatose, deceased, impassive, insensible, perished, numb, unconscious, asleep.

Scientific definition

The cessation of communication with the environment.

Summary description

Death seems to be a state of being, when someone has *lost* this animating force or spirit of life. Key to the definition is that dead people are no longer able to communicate with anyone. They cannot contact a source of renewable energy so that they continue to grow, develop, and express themselves, no matter their age.

The life has gone out of them; they cannot contact the source of life.

↳ *How would you define death? Literally and symbolically?*

I like this symbolic definition

Fixated and rigid, set in their ways. They no longer exhibit much of a life force; very often they lack curiosity, enthusiasm, and moments of inspiration.

Our fallen condition

You might not like to accept this, but since Adam's fall in the Garden, we have been dead in our trespasses and sins, and we will be until we are united with the Spirit of Jesus and made spiritually alive again. This is why many of the professionals cannot help very much. They lack the power to touch the human heart with God's life. So we spend millions trying to change people without God's power.

- And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience (Eph 1:1-2).
- Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind [thoughts], and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph 1:3).

Thank God, once we receive the Spirit of Jesus we have access to His divine nature, His divine life, His grace and His power.

- Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness ... For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4).
- Much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17).
- And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe (Eph 1:19).

Characteristics of Death

Now let's turn our attention to the characteristics of death. In my nursing career, I often was present when someone was dying or pronounced dead. I saw first-hand what someone looked like when the life had gone out of them: those dead bodies were cold, colorless, immovable, rigid, unseeing, unresponsive, and no longer able to communicate with anyone – just like the definitions of death.

Watching someone's life leave their body slowly is an incredibly challenging experience. We don't like to watch something die. When I lived in Michigan, I never even liked to watch the leaves fall or see old dead trees lying in the woods. They were no longer capable of any growth, bearing fruit, reproducing themselves, or even the capacity to bend in the wind. All growth had ceased.

As a student nurse, I was assigned to get a man out of bed who had an appendectomy some days earlier. (Remember, back then they kept people following surgery in bed for long periods of time.) As I got him sitting up on the side of the bed and he was about to stand, he suddenly slid down to the floor and was immovable – dead.

Sudden death is never a good thing. No one has time to prepare for it or say their goodbyes.

There is a time to die

Solomon reminded us that death is a part of life. There will be a time for every one of us to die. We cannot escape it; our time on earth will come to an end. However, we do not have to live in fear of it, if we have received the Spirit of Jesus Christ into our hearts. The real part of us cannot die, because we contain God's very own divine life.

Perhaps this explains why Solomon said, "The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth" (Eccl 7:1).

Dreams often concerned with issue of life and death

After studying ten thousand dreams of ordinary people to learn what the average person dreams about, dream researcher Calvin Hall reported that most dreams are about everyday concerns – not repressed or hidden conflicts.³ For example, we are concerned with our ideas about ourselves, other people, and the world around us.

Hall identified five types of issues typically occurring in the everyday dreams of normal people: 1) our struggles with mother & father; 2) our personal freedom vs. security; 3) our conflict between masculine & feminine; 4) our socialization vs. instinctual nature; 5) our concerns with life and death.

Death and rebirth

A fundamental principle of Christianity says that the old must die so the new can emerge. That's the message of Easter: *Life comes out of death*. The same power that brought Jesus out of the grave works to bring resurrection in us. Our dreams often mirror this process – not our actual death.⁴

³ Calvin Hall, *The Meaning of Dreams* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966).

⁴ Judith A. Doctor, *33 Ways: How to Unlock the Mystery of Your Dreams* (2018).

Although most death dreams are subjective – to be taken symbolically, not literally – occasionally people may dream of a recently deceased loved one. Called “gift dreams,” they bring comfort and peace into the heart of a bereaved person.⁵

Babies are very common motifs in the night hours. New babes may indicate a new phase of life, new idea, or new project in our lives. In our Sacred Text, we see the idea of rebirth into a new life. The soul in its approach to God is compared to a new-born baby.

- Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation (1 Pet 2:2).

The *New Living Translation* says it like this: “Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment.”

In my journey to wholeness, I often dreamed of babies – but most of the time I was neglecting to feed and care for them, or they were near death. Here is an example:

I discover my baby in the trunk of my car; it is shriveled up and near death. I had forgotten about it.

This dream was trying to make me aware of a problem that was slowing the growth of the new creation taking place in me, i.e., my true self. I was neglecting to drink spiritual milk from the living Word.

- And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold I am making all things new ... And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost (Rev 21:5-6).

Since only death can bring about profound transformation of the personality, people dying or dead in our dreams often symbolize this process. I dreamed many times about my mother dying, long after she was dead. And I have dreamed that she was alive, giving birth to a baby in her old age. Or I dreamed that our son who died at age 16 is ill again and struggling for life. These dreams symbolized my own struggle for life – the new creation.

Something we didn't learn in school

This lifetime is a series of simultaneous deaths and births. “Throughout the whole of life one must continue to learn to live,” said Seneca two millennia ago, “and what will amaze you even more, throughout life one must learn to die.”⁶

We just celebrated 63 years of marriage, but at one point in our life, we almost lost our marriage. We could no longer make it work. So we knelt down on our knees beside our bed; we told God our marriage was dead, and we surrendered it Him; we'd let it die.

We gave up all efforts to make it work. We just couldn't do it. We had tried everything. Read all the Christian books about marriage! But nothing seemed to work. We finally

⁵ Jean Clift & Wallace Clift. *Symbols of Transformation in Dreams* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 117.

⁶ Quoted in *The Sane Society* by Erich Fromm. Seneca (4 BC-65 AD) was a Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman.

came to the end of our efforts and surrendered our marriage into the hands of God. If He wanted it to live, He would have to make it work. If not, it was over with.

Thus it felt like a miraculous moment when the man – who resembled a Jewish prophet to us – walks up and tells us God had heard our prayers: He was going to make us of one heart!

In surrendering our marriage, we'd repented of our dead works and placed our faith in God and His resurrection power. Until we let something die, it seems God cannot do very much for us.

The pain of giving up is the pain of death, but death of the old is birth of the new. The pain of death is the pain of birth, and the pain of birth is the pain of death – "Journey of the Magi"⁷

A life truth

My friend's wife asked him as his father was dying, "Do you want to go and say goodbye to your Father?" "No," he said, "Why should I? I have never even said hello to him."

I will never forget what a wise German friend taught me when I asked her how she felt about getting old. She said, "I have learned the importance of saying *goodbye*, so that I am free to say *hello* to that which is in front of me – to be open for the new."

Over the years, I have counseled people who have never said goodbye to an old lover, even though they are now married; they even keep mementoes from their time with that person hidden away. Perhaps their soul is still tied to them.

I have also seen this problem with people who sell their family home; they have never let go of it, said goodbye to it. Their soul is held in bondage to the past so it is difficult to psychologically move forward in the future.

This same difficulty is often seen with people who don't want to let go of their youth. There are so many areas of life that this truth is needed, like with our failures, mistakes, losses, or misfortunes.

Saying good-by is a painful task. The act of giving something up is painful, so we try to avoid it. We must learn to see and accept this basic life truth.

↳ *Who or what do you need to say goodbye to?*

Can we be dead before our time?

I have a question for you: Can we be "dead" before our time?

My answer is "Yes!" As we grow up, it is easy to give up on the adventure of seeking and searching for life, simply because life is too difficult.

⁷ "Journey of the Magi" is a 43-line poem written in 1927 by T. S. Eliot

The perfect stable being is nothing but an automaton, a “thing.” – Tournier

American psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck,⁸ found that “most people stop growing and exploring the mystery of life very early in their adulthood. By the end of middle age most people have given up the fight! They are dead before their time. We need to continue until the moment of death to explore the mystery of life and reality.”

This is what explains the condition of countless people I have observed over the years. I remember sitting in restaurants in Germany, watching the people around us. So many of the older couples (who had gone through the war or lived under Communism) sat there eating like they were robots.

I could see it in their gestures, their lack of emotions, the lack of animation in their faces. There was seldom any conversation between them. Devoid of the drive toward life, the river of life was no longer flowing for them.

Recently I watched a movie called, *Elsa & Fred*, in which Fred (Christopher Plummer said to Elsa (Shirley MacLaine) as he stayed in bed day after day, “I am the living dead.” And of course Elsa set her mind to rekindle his life.

We will wither into a deadened routine unless rekindled. – Tournier

↪ ***Can you think of people who seem to be more dead than alive? How would you describe them?***

Qualities of a person who has stopped growing

- Rigid mode of thought and habit, the roles they play.
- Always repeats the same formula of words and actions every time you see them.
- Automatic, nothing more than a trained animal.
- Fixated, predictable.
- Loss of curiosity or inquiry.
- Lack enthusiasm.
- No original or creative thoughts and ideas.

↪ ***Are there any similarities between the person who has stopped growing and one who is literally dead?***

Read the following from a fiction work by Bodie Thone.⁹

She walked among the living, while her own heart ha*d died so long ago. Afraid, without hope in the soul, she lives among those whose heart has died. Unable to act in the face of terror—some people have not learned this yet—and are still a victim waiting for the next blow to be struck against them. It is

⁸ Dr. M. Scott Peck (1936–2005) was an American psychiatrist who was catapulted to notoriety through the runaway sales of *The Road Less Traveled* (1978). He was a nationally recognized authority on the relationship between religion and science, and the science of psychology in particular.

⁹ Bodie Thone, (1951-), co-authored more than 65 works of historical fiction with her husband. Over 35 million copies of their books have been sold in more than 20 languages.

only when our eyes are opened, and we rise up in vindication against those that are wrong and evil, that we become what God would have us to be.

↳ *How alive is this woman? Do you relate to her in some ways?*

Atheism kills the spirit

After observing the atheist states like the former Soviet Union, former Romania, China, and Nazi Germany, author Erick Metaxas¹⁰ said, “We must conclude that state-sponsored – and enforced – atheism must rank as the most wicked force of oppression in human history.”

Socialism of any type leads to a total destruction of the human spirit and to a leveling of mankind into death. – Alexander Solzhenitsyn¹¹

Notice that atheists denounce all religious expressions as irrational and as somehow “anti-science,” and therefore as intolerably vile and imminently dangerous, and in need of forceful eradication by whatever means available.

If there is no Creator and our lives are perfectly accidental, then there is no order or meaning in the universe – and no inherent purpose or meaning to our lives.

In the nineteenth century the problem was that God is dead. In the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead. – Erich Fromm¹²

My Story

“My own never die”

For many years I lived tormented with the fear of losing my son to death. But the following morning after our son did die, the Lord spoke to me as I came out of my sleep: “You can say David died, but I want you to know my own never die; I came and took him; I always come and take my own. And the word is ‘exultation.’ I allowed you to experience David’s spirit as he entered glory.”

After this, I was freed from the tormenting fear of death, which had often paralyzed me, keeping me from enjoying my life. I know I am not the only one; many people live their entire life filled with this fear of death. But we don’t need to.

We can be freed from this fear of death. The freeing agent is truth, truth about the work of Jesus on the cross, in his death and resurrection.

- Therefore, since 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,

¹⁰ Metaxas, *Is Atheism Dead?* (2021).

¹¹ Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) was a Russian novelist, philosopher, historian, and political prisoner. One of the most famous Soviet dissidents, he was an outspoken critic of communism.

¹² Erich Fromm (1900-1980) was social psychologist who fled the Nazi regime as a German Jew and settled in the US; he wrote numerous books including *The Art of Loving*, *Escape from Freedom*, and *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*. Fromm, *The Heart of Man, Its Genius for Good and Evil* (1964), Harper & Row

the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Heb 2:14).

- For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Cor 15:22).

Saying goodbye

Five days after our son died, my mother's arms simply would not stop aching for him. During his last months, I had been so close to him; I now felt like a part of me was missing. I turned to the Lord and prayed, "Father, please remove this ache from my arms." That night I dreamed ...

I am holding him one more time. I tell him he is going to be leaving us and what it will like for him. I compare it to his birth, how it was for him to come here, how he had to pass through a narrow dark passage before emerging into the light. I said to him, "It will be like that ... a long dark passage, but you will emerge out into a most glorious place."

As I awoke from this dream, the most amazing thing happened – the ache in my arms was gone! Right in the dream, I had released my child and let him go. But know this, saying *goodbye* can be a painful task. The act of letting go of somebody or something is necessary before we can enter the next stage of our journey in life.

In its major forms, giving up is the most painful of human experiences. The feeling associated with giving up something loved—or at least something that is a part of ourselves and familiar—is depression. – Dr. M. Scott Peck¹³

Reflection Points

- ◆ What will you take away from this chapter?
- ◆ What is the chief difference between life and death?
- ◆ Meditate on this Scripture: "But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, or are hidden away in prisons; they have become a prey with none to deliver them, and a spoil, with none to say, 'Give them back'" (Isa 42:22).

Your Response

- ⇒ Can you remember experiences and places where you left feeling oppressed, downcast, unsatisfied – that took away your life, crushing you?
- ⇒ Try to recall experiences and places where you left feeling uplifted, joyful, encouraged, and hopeful. Where were you then? What were you doing?
- ⇒ Do you live with a tormenting fear of death? If yes, ask God to free you from it.
- ⇒ Who have you lost to death? If you still have pain surrounding this loss, here are three things you can do: 1) Write an ode to your loved one in honor of them. 2) Write a letter to the person, saying all the things you wished you had said and say

¹³ Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (1978).

goodbye to him or her, releasing them to Jesus Christ. 3) Allow yourself to feel your pain and show it to Jesus. Actually cry it out to him, and then ask for his healing grace and comfort to touch this wound in your heart.

- ⇒ Do you need your life to be rekindled? Have you tried to rekindle someone's life?
- ⇒ Using a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (totally alive), how alive do you want to be?
- ⇒ Draw a picture of yourself as if you were in a tomb or a cave.¹⁴ How far out of the tomb or cave are you? How far out do you want to go?

¹⁴ A tomb is a large vault, typically an underground one, for burying the dead.