

The Good Report

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The Problem of Death

I am going to die. You are going to die.

One day you will die. Your eyes will go dim and your body will exhale, your skin will turn sallow and still. We don't like to think about it but it's the inevitability that stalks us all, slave and tyrant, poor and rich alike.

We trivialise death with fiction and when we meet it face to face we hide it behind flowers, makeup and indirect language. We entertain ourselves with video games, series and films centred on killing; we feel a thrill as we watch series and films of people murdering each other. Yet when a loved one actually dies, it's not a joke, it's not a game. We laugh at death while it stays at arm's length but it will draw near to us all.

Denial of our impending death

We like to imagine ourselves as sovereign over everything. We plan for our own safety and security as if to subconsciously tell ourselves that we have life sorted. But *death* strips away our disillusionment reminding us that we are not gods. The bitter realisation of death reveals that our precious life is truly finite. And so death is the great interruption, tearing loved ones away from us, or us from them. Death is the great insult, because it reminds us, as Shakespeare said, that we are worm food.

As an accountant who used to work in Tax, the number one question I got from friends is how I can help them pay less tax or avoid paying it altogether. It's our nature to try to cheat our way out of things, to avoid certainties that are not in our favour. In spite of the certainty of death and taxes, the mind has always dreamed of discovering loopholes in whatever mechanisms fix the limits. Yet though it might be possible to find small loopholes regarding one's taxes, cheating death? Not a chance. Eventually, death honours its unwelcomed appointment with all of us, often earlier than expected. Yet despite its certainty, we continue to be constantly surprised whenever death strikes. Why is that? We all know we are going to die someday, so why is it that we seem so unprepared for it? Why is it that we tend to live as if it will never happen?

One reason is that the great blessing of modern medicine has hidden death from us. Death was something that people often used to see up close. Nearly everyone grew up seeing corpses and watching relatives die, young and old. But now medicine and science have relieved us of many causes of early death, and today the vast majority of people decline and die in hospitals and hospices away from the eyes of others. It is normal now to live to adulthood and not see a corpse except in the brief glance of an open coffin at a funeral. And so because society is set up so that death is in one sense hidden from us, it means that we live in denial of the inevitability of our impending death. In the Biblical book of Psalms, readers are called to "number our days" that we may "gain a heart of wisdom." There has always been a danger that humans would live in denial of their own death. Of

course, we know intellectually that we are going to die, but deep down we repress it, we act as if we are going to live forever. And that's not wise. We even find the discussion of death "in bad taste" or worse. Death has replaced "sex" as the new unmentionable word. There are even thinkers today who seriously believe death can be solved like any technological "performance issue." All this means is that modern people are unrealistic about and unprepared for death.

Our age is so devoid of hope in the face of death that the topic has become unmentionable. Rather than accept and prepare for the inevitable, we only avert and deny it. Ernest Becker in his Pulitzer Prize-winning 'The Denial of Death', argues that we cannot accept that all we are - our conscious self, our loves, our profound aspirations for beauty, goodness, truth - is going to cease to exist in a literal blink of an eye. If death truly is the end - if we all die and eventually even the whole human civilization "dies" in the death of the sun - then nothing we do will make any final difference. How can we avoid, even now, a sense of nothingness? The fear of insignificance in the face of non-existence must be dealt with in some way.

While fear of death is somewhat universal, previously we addressed it through belief in life and meaning after death. The problem for us today, however, is that most Westerners have trouble believing this anymore, which is what makes the fear of death so prominent a part of our psychological make-up. As religion and faith in God recede, the problem of death grows.

Let me give an illustration to help. Imagine some guy broke into your house, tied you up, and announced that he is going to kill you. He turns to you and says, "I'm not heartless - tell me something you do that you really enjoy." You answer that you enjoy playing PlayStation. "Alright, let's play your favourite PlayStation game for a bit, then I'll kill you after. Won't that make your final moments pleasant?" The reality is your impending death would drain all the satisfaction out of the game. Death takes the significance and joy out of things. So shouldn't we be frightened of it? Many today argue that death is nothing to be frightened of since it is believed that when you die you simply don't know anything or feel anything. There is no pain or anguish. So why be afraid? I find this somewhat difficult to relate to. It is brutal and dishonest to tell people facing death, and therefore the loss of all love relationships, that they should not fear it. Dylan Thomas strikes a far more resonant chord with us when he says we should "rage, rage against the dying of the light." He's right, you cannot not fear and hate death, unless, maybe, you have little or no love relationships. Death is a unique and profound problem. Religion gave people tools to help in facing our most formidable enemy, and modern secularism has not come up with anything reasonable to compensate for its loss.

Why does something natural feel so unnatural?

Scientists agree that there is nothing more inevitable and natural than violence; evolution and natural selection are predicated on it. Yet just as violence is considered a crime we also consider death an injustice. Even though death is inevitable it still feels like a violation of the way things are supposed to be, and our grief acknowledges that. But why does death feel unnatural if it has been the normal way of things since life began? Why does it make us rage?

The first reason is because of what it does to our relationships, it puts an end to love. Love feels right so anything that kills love feels wrong. By definition, love wants to last; we never want to depart from those we love. Yet death strips us of relationships that make our life meaningful, one relationship at a time over years. Finally, it comes for you and removes you from those remaining who love you. How can that be nothing to fear? There's nothing worse than seeing a loved one dead. Gone. And if you're fortunate to live a long life, you will be encountering death more and more as you go on - the death of not just associates but friends, and not just friends but dearly loved ones. In

more disturbing times I used to ask which is worse: living a long life seeing those you love die one by one until you are almost entirely alone, or living a short life knowing the grief your loved ones will experience when you are gone? The more time I spent with elderly friends and family, the more I came to realise that I'm not sure they had an answer. One thing we can agree on, however, is that death is, as the scripture declares, our ultimate enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26).

I remember having a conversation with my father. He lost both siblings and told me that sometimes it doesn't feel real, "I know it sounds strange, but at times I want to call my brother or sister and have a chat, and then realise what I already know: I can't, they're not here anymore." It's as if our mind shuts off the reality of death. Another reason we fear death is that many approach death with the assumption that after death there is nothing - no existence or consciousness. But that cannot be proven, and to be certain of it requires a leap of faith. For example, imagine driving in the dark at night and your car lights suddenly break and turn off, wouldn't you be scared and slow down? And if you are driving toward death without the ability to see what's coming, it should also make you uneasy.

If death is the end, what is life all about?

While we are afraid of death, it also makes us question things. At the end of their lives, most people reflect and ask "what was this life all about?" Steve Jobs, when contemplating his own death, confessed that "it's strange to think that you accumulate all this experience... to find it just goes away." Our intuition triggers a protest against the way secularism seems to reduce life so that "all our getting and spending amount to nothing more than fidgeting while we wait for death." This led Steve Jobs to admit "I really want to believe our consciousness endures."

Our intuition repeatedly nags us that there's got to be something more to life than what secularism can account for. To most people, curiosity about higher things is natural. Strict materialism holds that people are only physical entities without souls, and when loved ones die they simply cease to exist, the sensations and values of love and beauty are only neurological-chemical events, there is no real right nor wrong outside of what we subjectively determine and choose. Those positions are at the very least deeply counterintuitive for nearly all people. People believe in God not merely because they feel some emotional need, but because it makes sense of what they see and experience.

If death is the end destination, then there is no point in life. Philosopher Thomas Nagal proposed that since "the grave is life's only ultimate goal, perhaps it's ridiculous to take ourselves so seriously." Perhaps the intuition that our lives "matter from the outside" is just a delusion. Why is it that we want our lives to be connected to something beyond our mere pleasures and comforts, to be significant of something higher? Having meaning in life is to have both an overall purpose for living and the assurance that you are making a difference by serving some good beyond yourself. If it is true that this sense of meaning is as much a delusion as secularism would have us think then "man is a useless passion." Albert Camus famously argued that life is absurd: "The absurd is born of the confrontation between the human need and unreasonable silence of the world." We want to find meaning in things but the universe does not cooperate. We try to do good for people we love, but what we do never lasts, nor do they, so does it really matter? All our greatest hopes are frustrated by death; it's a closed door and the end of our struggle. In the mind of the atheist, the sting of death is only the inevitable end of everything we could never rightly understand or comprehend.

If there is no God and life ends at the grave, then ultimately it doesn't matter whether you are a genocidal maniac or an altruist; it won't matter whether you fight hunger in Africa or are incredibly cruel and greedy. Some people are remembered for a few years after their death, some for a few millennia, but without God everyone will be forgotten eventually, it's just a matter of timescale. In

the end, what you do will make no difference whatsoever. It might make some people happier or sadder for a brief time while they live, but beyond that, your influence – good or bad – will likely be negligible when viewed on any grand scale. In a materialistic vision of life our destiny is fixed so no matter what you do in life, ultimately it is all insignificant. Nothing counts forever. Nothing.

Does it, therefore, surprise you that suicide rates are surging? In the U.S. for example, the overall suicide rate rose 24% from 1999 to 2014, and it's getting worse. Innumerable polls in the United States and Europe show declining confidence about the future. When analyzed, it basically adds up to *a loss of hope*. No one can live without hope.

For example, imagine that you and another person of the same age, socioeconomic status, educational level, and even the same temperament are both given a new job. Your manager tells you both that “you are part of an assembly line, and I want you to simply slot together two components then hand what you have assembled to someone else. I want you to do that over and over for eight hours a day.” You and your colleague are in the same environment with the same number of breaks in a day. It is boring work. Your conditions are the same in every way – except for one thing. You are being paid minimum wage, and the other person doing the same job is paid 10 times your wage. After a couple of weeks, you will probably be saying, “this is so tedious and boring. Isn't it driving you insane? I think I might quit.” And the other person will say, “No. I have no problem working here, I'm perfectly content and happy here. In fact, I love it!”

What's happening here? You have two people who are experiencing identical circumstances in radically different ways. What makes the difference? It is the expectation of the future. This illustration is not intended to say that all we need is a good income. It does, however, show that what we believe about our future completely controls how we are experiencing our present. We are irreducibly hope-based creatures. We cannot bear life by living only for the present, facing one disconnected event after another, pursuing only instant desires. We are future-oriented beings so we must understand ourselves as being part of a story that leads somewhere. We cannot live without at least an implicit set of beliefs that our lives are building towards some end, some hope, to which our actions are contributing.

How can there be progress if everything dies?

Traditionally hope was chiefly expressed through a Christian story that gave meaning to suffering and pleasure alike and promised deliverance from death. But then belief in God and the supernatural began to drift from the minds of the modern man. Instead of finding ultimate hope in the kingdom of God, men began to believe in the sacred calling of progressing to become the “greatest on earth.” But it was Christianity that gave the idea of *progress*. Christian theology understood history to be linear, sovereignly controlled by God, moving toward a day of judgement, justice, and the establishment of the peaceable divine kingdom. So deeply is the idea of human progress etched in our thinking that it is embodied in vocabulary that describes good trends as “progressive,” bad ones as “regressive” or “backwards,” and some thinkers as “ahead of their time.”

Today, however, the idea of progress is becoming less and less justified. If in our secular society we no longer have moral absolutes, no true fixed basis of right and wrong, then how can we even define what progress (and regress) is? Isn't every claim that such and such is “progressive” a value judgement that is neither self-evident nor empirically provable? Therefore, every declaration of progress is an imposition of one group's values on the rest of us. And if all stories end in the grave (sooner or later), where is all the “progress” getting to? Nowhere, it's all hopeless, and if so, then “progress” is a word that should not be used, it is only justifiable to use that word within a theistic worldview. The Christian hope lies in the future of God. This hope enabled many of the persecuted

Christians of past times to endure severe suffering in hope of eternal justice and divine blessing. It gives hope beyond death.

The great challenge to human hope is to make sense of death, stand up to death, and help us face the fear of death and even triumph over it. In our current phase, we have lost belief in God and salvation. We have replaced serving God with self-actualisation, putting ourselves in the place of God. We do not consider claims of religion to ever overrule our pursuit of individual freedom and happiness. Our hope is now for individual freedom to pursue our own private ideas of good and to discover our authentic selves. The great trouble with that story, however, is that it cannot incorporate and render meaningful the single most immutable and certain fact of life - death. One of the crucial parts of the Christian story has always been "deliverance from death" through Christ. But in the contemporary, individualistic, secular understanding of things, death simply interrupts and stops the story. It does not enhance or progress toward your goals but destroys them.

Is all life futile?

The ancient King Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes, thought much about death and even the futility of life. Solomon reflected deeply on the frustrations of human existence and became disappointed with the so-called 'good things' of life - pleasure, wealth, power, all unable to bring ultimate meaning in life. Having tried everything that his mind could grasp and his wealth could afford, Solomon found that there was a monotony, a circularity, and a fatality to all human endeavor. He examines all of life's effort and labours, that whatever your success, whatever you achieve or succeed to build in life, sooner or later will fade away - as "*a generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains.*"

King Solomon recognises this 'march of time' with the reality that on a cosmic scale, we are a blip. Despite your hard work to build something for your name's sake, a legacy, your moment of success or significance is then followed by the reality of decay. You age, you weaken, your body becomes increasingly tired, your sight fades, hearing goes, bones ache, beauty fades, loved ones are lost and you await a slow and often lonely slide down to the grave. It's brutal but sadly true. We strive to build a life of momentary significance only to find the certainty that just like all kingdoms our efforts will soon be ruins.

The second realisation Solomon comes to terms with is death. Those who are good, bad, rich, poor, wise, foolish, clever, all share the same destiny - we join the dead. Death is the great human equalizer. "All go to one place: all are from the dust, and to dust we shall return." So what we leave behind is left to those who may be none the wiser, who will likewise share the same fate. The final disturbing realisation Solomon had is the randomness of life. Chance seems to have a great impact in dictating our lives, since "*the race is not always to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food always come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned, but time and chance happen to them all.*" Chance has it that there is a time for everything, a time to weep, laugh, build up, tear down, to gain, lose... Life is unbalanced, uneven, like a current in the ocean, life often pulls us in directions beyond our reason.

In summary, King Solomon recognises the summit of life's efforts and desires as vanity. Solomon releases life is like a vapour, it's there, but fades. Like smoke, life is confusing, unclear, difficult to grasp, and then it's gone. Who can rescue us from the disappointment of life? So Solomon decides that since all of life is like a passing wind, you might as well stop worrying about life and choose to enjoy the gifts of life as much and as long as you can. Yet, in spite of his pessimism, Solomon advises his readers to work hard, be wise, but most importantly: the final conclusion he made is that since "the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it," then the

only thing that really matters in life is where you stand before God. Life comes from God and your life will return to God to give an account to His divine reason. Solomon put it like this, “let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

There is some wisdom to be learnt here. If death truly is the end, nothing we do has any true significance, which is just demotivating. If this is true then all our effort and activities, our dreams and hopes, are frustrated. But if death is not the end, if there is a God, then some things do have true lasting significance, and that impacts what we value in life, and therefore how we live. We recognise the fleeting nature of our materialistic existence – pleasure, wealth and beauty can be enjoyed, but we place no hope in them, nor any security, and therefore we do not fall into despair at their loss.

Our flesh will fade but the spirit endures and returns to the God who gave it, so we focus this life on living right, doing good, speaking the truth, being a light. We acknowledge that we have a God-given responsibility to accept God’s graces, and live within the moral boundaries of a loving relationship with God. This examined life is dedicated to its eternal source. The conscience responds to the holiness of God, the mind is nurtured and nourished by the truth of God, the imagination is enlarged and purified by the beauty of God, the heart, or our impulses, respond to the love of God and the will surrenders to the purpose of God. This is the life that lives on in the hands of the God who formed it.

Death should feel unnatural

We have talked about accepting our impending death and how knowledge of God and an afterlife ought to shape our priorities and what we value in this present life. But none of those actually help us deal with the loss and grief of losing a loved one. This will be our next focus.

Death is not the end. The reason death intuitively feels so unnatural is because death was not part of God’s original design. We were not created to age, weaken, fade, and die. We were not created for love relationships that end in death. According to the Biblical narrative, death is an intrusion, a result of our turning away from God at the beginning. We are trapped in a world of death, a world for which we were not designed. So for the Christian, the underlying basis for our grief is borne out of a recognition that death was not in God’s original design for the world.

Look at the first three chapters of Genesis; we were meant to last, we were meant to get more and more beautiful as time goes on, not more and more enfeebled. We were meant to get stronger, not to weaken and die. But when we turned from God to be our own lords and saviours, everything broke. *God left us to the authority of the natural world which moves from order to decay.*

There aren’t many truths more profound than the idea that God weeps with us. When Jesus visited the family of a good friend who’d just died, he wept. He burned with anger at the injustice of death. Death is a deep distortion of the creation God loves. So when we see death, we grieve with sorrow and anger because that is the right response to the evil of death. We grieve because we acknowledge that Death is not how life ought to be. It’s not part of God’s intention, it’s part of our rebellion against God to live in a world without Him. As God is the source of life, rejecting Him inescapably means choosing death. God gives us over to our destructive desires but it makes Him weep too.

To say “death is just natural,” is to harden and perhaps kill a part of your heart’s hope that makes you human. We know deep down that we are not like trees or grass. We were created to last. We don’t want to be inconsequential. We don’t want to just be a wave upon the sand. The deepest desire of our hearts is for love that lasts. Death isn’t truly part of the circle of life. Death is the end of it. So

grieve. Cry.

Hope in the face of grief

Yet while we grieve in the face of death, we do not fall into despair. Why? Because in the Christian perspective we have hope. Ultimately everything in life is temporary, but God's love isn't. It's the one thing you can't lose. Without God's love to embrace us, we will always feel radically insecure, and we ought to be. And if God's love is the only thing that can't be taken away from you, then without Him you have no true security.

For example, in the Old Testament, when David fought Goliath, they both fought as a champion for their respective armies. They fought as substitutes. If your champion won, the whole army won the battle, even though none of them lifted a finger. And that is what Jesus did. He took on our greatest enemies - sin and death. He gave his life, but in so doing he defeated them. He took the penalty we deserve for our wrongdoings, as our substitute. But because he himself was a man of perfect sinless love for God and us, death could not hold him. Death had no right to him because he was innocent of any moral wrong. He rose from death. He destroyed the power of death because he died for us, taking away our penalty and guaranteeing the future resurrection of all who unite with him by faith. Jesus Christ, our champion, has defeated death. And so he is in effect the solution to our dilemma.

The immortal Son of God was sent into the world, sharing in our humanity, becoming subject to weakness and death. But then going through death he broke its power, in order to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15). And likewise, those who give their life to Christ reverse the rebellion that causes death. They receive the fruit of what only God could achieve, freedom from the death-decay that comes through separation from God as they become God's children. Through placing our allegiance in God we walk through the door He has opened. Our renewed relationship reconnects us with the source of all life so death no longer has the final say. Jesus has paid for our sins. We may physically die, but death now becomes an entry to eternal life with him. This is why believers in Christ are no longer enslaved to the fear of death. We may grieve, but we still have hope.

Jesus conquered death and we will share in his resurrection. That's our hope. If you don't have that hope, I'm not sure what you do when you are in the presence of death. So when we grieve and rage in the face of death, we are responding appropriately to a great evil. But the hope that God gives stirs courage and consolation into the midst of our grief. Neither stifling grief nor giving way to despair is right.

All religions talk about death and the afterlife, but in general, they proclaim that you must lead a "good" life in order to earn eternity. Yet as death approaches, we all know we have not even come close to doing our best; we have not lived as we ought. So we stay enslaved by the fear of death until the end. Christianity is different. It doesn't leave you to face death on your own, holding your life record and hoping it will suffice. Instead, it gives you a champion who has faced death, who pardons you and covers you with his love. You face death "in him" and with his perfect record (Philippians 3:9). To the degree you believe, know, and embrace that, we are released from the power of death.

As Saint Paul wrote: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'"

Now let us just attempt to grasp the power of that hope. The future for those who "die in Christ" is a world of infinite love. The greatest happiness we can experience is to be loved by another person, and yet, on earth, the greatest love relationships are like a pipe so clogged that only a little water (or

love) actually gets through. In heaven, however, all these “clogs” are removed and the love we will experience will be infinitely, inexpressibly greater than anything we have known here. But our hope is also material. At the end of all things, we will get new bodies. We will be raised like Jesus was raised. Christ taught his disciples that, unlike all other major religions, Christianity is not a spirit-only future, but a new heaven and earth, a perfected material world in which all suffering, tears, disease, evil, injustices, and death have been eliminated. So our future is not an immaterial one. We are not going to float in the Kingdom of God like ghosts. We are going to walk, eat, hug, and be hugged. We are going to love. We’re going to sing. And we will do all this in degrees of joy, excellence, satisfaction, beauty, and power we cannot now imagine. We’re going to eat and drink with the Son of Man. It’s getting the love, the body, the mind, the being we’ve always longed for. It’s a personal future of love relationships and the restoration of all things. It’s not just all you’ve ever wanted, but more than you dare ask or think. Now if the knowledge of this future was always present in our minds, and we really believed and held this hope and trust in God, would we become as downcast as we do? Would we ever envy anyone?

There is a greater hope than our personal and material one. Saint Paul doesn’t seem to be most excited by simply being together with others, nor how great the new world will be. His biggest emphasis, his greatest hope, is that we will be “with the Lord forever.” It means we will be in perfect communion with God, that we will see the Lord face-to-face. In one of his letters to the early church, Paul writes: “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully even as I am fully known.”

With this future glory in mind, it means you don’t have to live with regrets in the sense that you don’t say, “I never got any photos when I went to this place,” or “I never had this experience.” Anything wonderful or great in the world will only be an echo or foretaste of what is present in the Vision of God and in the New Heaven and New Earth. When at last you see the God of the universe looking at you with love, all of the potentialities of your soul will be released and you will experience the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We long for love without parting, for life that does not decay, for character that is not so easily corrupted. The gospel resonates because it’s the one story that satisfies all these longings yet is historically true. It happened. If Jesus Christ was really raised from the dead, if he is really the Son of God and you believe in him, all these things that you long for most desperately will come true at last. We will escape death. We will know love without parting, and we will see evil defeated forever. If we believe this good news, we are assured that all those longings will be fulfilled.

And how can we be sure that faith in Christ will usher us into this future? One ground of assurance is the Resurrection of Christ himself, the historical evidence for which is formidable. **I don’t believe in an afterlife because I can’t face up to the concept of our end, but because I have good reason to believe Jesus did actually rise from the dead.** It’s not a coping crutch, it’s a reality.

This is why while awaiting execution in prison for plotting against Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was able to call the death of a Christian “the supreme festival on the road to freedom.” As a friend once said to me, “the Christian view creates this paradox in that the thing we often see as the greatest separation from others, death, is actually what allows us to know God. Death is no longer an end but actually brings an eternal closeness, a hope beyond comparison. What was once the darkest end is now the beginning of eternal life for those that know Jesus because his resurrection brings us close.” Paul the apostle knew this well since he wrote, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” and that “I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”

Hope shapes our present life

This is the sum of the matter: contrary to secularism, far from being the accidental byproducts of a mindless collocations of atoms, we are purposeful beings whose spiritual radars, amidst much static noise, are attuned to our heart's true home. Trouble begins, however, when we look for the fulfilment of our desires in our limited earthly lives. We zealously seek ultimate fulfilment in such traitorous idols as pleasure, material wealth, professional success, power, and other means, without taking into account the fleeting nature of human existence. There is more to you than this brief, limited life. Accept the fleeting nature of this temporary life and focus on the eternal. Focus on what is good and godly.

We are the creation of an eternal being and we're designed to live in eternity. If this life is all there is then every moment is as brief and pointless as another, and the end is meaningless. Time is limited but not sacred. However, if how we choose to spend this limited life has eternal consequences then every moment is imbued with weight. Every brief moment can have an important and sacred end. If I live for what is eternal, no temporary sacrifice is too great for the eternal joy of being in the presence of the One who shaped me.

Those who hold to a naturalistic worldview come face to face with a dilemma: why should I devote all of my energy to making a meaningful difference in the world if it is true that everything "done under the sun" will eventually amount to zero? Yet the Bible grasps this nettle with astounding clarity. God not only has placed a yearning for our true home in our hearts but also has promised to clothe the perishable with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality through Christ's own death (1 Corinthians 15:54). To miss out on eternity is to miss out on the entire point of your life. In the meantime, the light of the gospel shines an eternal perspective upon our service unto God and humanity, infusing all of our activities with significance.

This present world is not over. We still live in a world of decay, disease, and death. This is what is meant by the "overlap of the ages." The kingdom of God - God's power to renew the whole of creation - has broken into the old world through Christ's first coming, but it is not fully realised as God is being patient with us. The old order is still here, though it is living on borrowed time. It is "passing away," as Paul says.

This is our hope, and with this hope, we are free from the fear of death. The corrupt powers of the world have many tools to make people afraid, the worst being death. When you know that a civil power or some other power can kill you, you're scared, and they can use that fear to control you. But since Jesus died and rose from the dead, if you can approach Jesus and cling to him you know that death, the worst possible thing that can possibly happen to you, is now the best thing. When death loses its sting, when death no longer has power over you because of what Jesus did on the cross, then you can live a life of love and not of fear.