



1 thing to do before you die

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Why do some die young, while others live long lives?

We can come up with all of our fanciful ideas as to why God lets one live and takes another. I've heard them all regarding my own son, who died in July of this year. People will say things like, "Maybe God was saving him from something bad," or "It's just that God wanted another angel (and/or flower) in heaven." The list goes on.

I simply fall back on the fact that I will probably *never* know why. And even if I did know, I seriously doubt that I would understand.

One day, however, I will. The Bible promises that.

Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now (1 Corinthians 13:12, NLT).

So, why does God take choice servants "before their time"?

It's a question many of God's people probably asked about Stephen, a godly, vibrant young man who became the first martyr of the early church. In that case, we can make a pretty good guess as to why the Lord took him home. God used that shocking murder to stir the believers who seemed to be "landlocked" in a comfortable "holy huddle" in Jerusalem.

Because of the wave of persecution against the church following Stephen's martyrdom, the believers fanned out into the known world. And so did the Gospel. Then, the very man hunting them and the church's chief antagonist ended up coming to Christ! I speak, of course, of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the great apostle Paul.

It was still a great tragedy that a man died so young and so unjustly, and many godly people wept and grieved over the news of what had happened to him. He had been a good man and a good friend, and he was missed!

But that raises the question again. Why does God allow torment for some and triumph for others?

No one can say this side of heaven. The Bible gives us the account of wicked King Herod who arrested and immediately executed the apostle James – brother of John and a close personal friend of Jesus when He walked this earth.

And just like that, he was gone.

Herod, seeing this pleased the religious leaders who hated the church, were delighted when Herod followed up James' execution with the arrest of Peter. It looked like the end for the former fisherman and church leader, but the believers prayed, and God delivered Peter from his prison. He lived to preach another day. In fact, Bible scholars think Peter lived at least another 20 years before his own date with martyrdom.

But why did James die and Peter go free? It's hard to say. The fact is, life just doesn't make sense a great deal of the time. But God has His purposes that often remain a mystery to us.

When we say someone "died before their time," we are making a false assumption. What we are assuming is that there's an unwritten promise of a long life. We somehow think that everyone, in the words of Spock from Star Trek, is entitled to "Live long and prosper!"

But the Bible makes no such guarantees. The Bible tells us that our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15). It also tells us, "There is a time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). We really have nothing to say about the date of our birth, or death. Then again, we have a lot to say about that space in the middle.

Moses wrote: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). To "number our days" means to "make the most of our time."

So, here's is how it breaks down:

- Don't take any of your loved ones for granted.
- If there's someone who needs to hear you say, "I love you," **DO IT NOW!**
- If there's a change you need to make in your life, **DO IT NOW!**

Dave Freeman wrote a very popular book entitled, "100 Things to Do Before You Die." In the book, he offered this counsel: "This life is a short journey. ... How can you make sure you fill it with the most fun and that you visit all the coolest places on earth before you pack those bags for the very last time?" He goes on to detail some ways to "really make life count" by doing things like attending the Academy Awards and running with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain.

The sad thing is that the author of this book died recently at the age of 47, after hitting his head in a fall in his home. He had only accomplished half of the items on his list. According to a friend interviewed after the author's sudden death, Dave Freeman's mantra in life was: "You should live every day like it would be your last." The friend added, "There's not many people who do."

Life, however, is more than "visiting the coolest places" and "having the most fun." There is a place for adventure and hilarity, but life – real life – is about bringing glory to our Creator, learning His will and following it.

That is the *one thing* we should all be doing.

The Bible gives us the account of when Jesus stopped in at the home of his friends, Mary and Martha. Martha wanted to make Jesus a gourmet feast and was working slavishly in the kitchen. She got so caught up and flustered by this effort that she stormed out to where Jesus was teaching in the other room and demanded that her sister – who had been sitting at His feet drinking in every word – come and assist her.

The fact of the matter is, there is a time for work, and there is a time to sit and listen to what God has to say. Mary understood that. So, seeing her frustration, Jesus said to Martha: "Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it – it's the main course, and won't be taken from her" (Luke 10:41-42, The Message).

"*Only one thing is essential*," said Jesus. Mary understood that essential thing to be time with God, and glorifying Him with her life.

In the final analysis, it's not a matter of *if* you will die, but only *when*. So do what you need to do now, and then you can live with a clear conscience, ready to meet God at the time He appoints, whether it be today or 80 years from now.

My son Christopher was walking with and glorifying God when he was called home. I was proud of him then (and told him so), and I am proud of him now.

Don't linger too long. . . .