



20 The Day I "Died" and Lived to Tell About It

Once in a while we hear of someone dying and by quick artificial respiration or heart massage being brought back to life. Usually such an experience helps us think more clearly about the true priorities of life.

I am one of those who have "died," and yet I still live. And the way I now live after this experience is entirely different from the way I lived before it happened. When I "died," I faced my own little moment of truth. It straightened out my priorities. In fact, it wouldn't be right to say that I ever truly "lived" before that time when I "died." I didn't know what life was all about until I discovered death to self.

After it happened, I began to see something I had never seen before: the world of nature teaches this same grand truth—no real life is possible without our dying first. For example, take a towering forest giant: how did the tree come to be? A little seed fell in the ground and died. Each blade of grass tells the same story: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Jesus was the first man on earth to see this truth so clearly taught in the things of nature.

Are you really alive, vibrant, happy, on top of the world? Not unless you have truly died first with Christ.

But just how do we go about having this experience? Right now we come face to face with a stupendous fact: the Bible is the only book in the world that gives us a step-by-step, how-to-do-it plan for life coming from death. The world of nature teaches this lesson, and the Bible is the handbook that agrees with nature's teaching. The book of nature and the Bible both come from the pen of the same Author! Let's start looking for this secret of life.

Real Living—Where You Least Expect to Find It!

1. Has real Life come knocking at your door? Are you sure? See John 1:1, 4, 9. (Compare John 14:6.)

ANSWER: Christ, the Life and the Light of the world, "lighteth every

The answer is "Yes!" That Light is what brings life. And it has already come to you.

2. Contrary to what probably 99% of the people think, what kind of "life" does Christ bring?

John 10:10.

ANSWER: "I am come that they might have _____, and that they might have it _____."

3. Read the experience of one who truly died and lived again. What kind of pleasures are his? Psalm 16:10,11.

ANSWER: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in _____; . . . in Thy presence is _____; at Thy right hand there are _____."

In Acts 2:27 Peter quotes these words. Turning there you will read that this refers to Jesus (read verses 27-32). Jesus is the first man on this planet who ever truly lived and who began by dying. "Behold, I am alive forevermore," He says. When He said in John 12:24 that a common seed that "abideth alone" comes to nothing, He was talking about Himself. Friends had been urging Him to flee and to save Himself from His murderous enemies in Palestine. "The only way I can truly live," He answered in effect, "is to stay here and die."

4. What is the only way you will ever truly live, now or ever? Galatians 2:19, 20.

ANSWER: "... I through the law am _____, that I might _____ . I am _____ with Christ: nevertheless I _____; yet _____, but Christ _____; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the _____, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Some like to think that "dead to the law" means "deaf to the law." No. One who is "dead to the law" no longer disobeys the law. He says, "The law commands me to do what self within me refuses to do. Therefore self shall die." The "I" which is "crucified with Christ" is self. We deny our own selfish will which is by nature at cross-purposes with God's will. The constant conflict rages in every person's heart—no compromise is ever possible. One or the other must be crucified—we must "crucify Christ afresh" or crucify self.

The Lord Jesus Himself fought the same battle in His own soul. He died not only once on the cross, but every moment of His life He denied self. In His soul, as in our souls, self struggled for control: "I seek not Mine own will," He said, "but the will of the Father which hath sent Me" (John 5:30). That is how He died every day.

And the life of the apostle Paul was a constant conflict with self. He also said, I "die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did God's will, however crucifying to his nature. But the result was wonderful joy.

When he said, "I am crucified with Christ," he meant that he, too, was following Jesus' example. "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt" had now become his constant daily prayer.

5. Paul pricked the Christians of his day with a startling "Know-ye-not?" challenge. What was it? Romans 6:3-5.

ANSWER: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized _____?"

6. See the "how" of this marvelous "path to life" in Romans 6:6, 7:

ANSWER: "Our _____ is crucified with Him, that the _____ might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not _____." Only "he that is _____ is freed from sin."

When in algebra, " $x + 2 = 4$," you know that $x = 2$. Who is the "old man" here? Galatians 2:20 has told us who the mysterious "Mr. X" is: he is self. When he dies, "the body of sin," the very substance of it, is destroyed. And not until self dies, is that root of sin eradicated. Clearly this is not a once-for-all thing; Paul uses the present tense. This constant surrender of the selfish will goes on all through our lives. The old man comes to life with each new day, and as often, we must kneel and permit self to die with Christ (see Luke 9:23, 24).

7. Take one more look at this "how" text: Can anyone crucify self on his own? Galatians 2:20.

ANSWER: Our old man is crucified " _____ Christ."

What Paul said (according to the original language) is that his ego is "crucified with Christ." That is, his selfish pride, his selfish will, that has been contrary to God, his selfish ambition, his glorying in his own achievements or abilities— this is the ego. It is impossible for any honest heart to "see" the cross of Christ, believe, and continue living selfishly. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead [that is, all would be dead]: and that He died for all, that they which live should not [that is, will find it impossible] henceforth [to] live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

"Many are inquiring, 'How am I to make the surrender of myself to God?' You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; but you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can *choose* to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him....

"Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith." *Happiness Digest*, p. 21.

8. When you die to self, -what happens to your old fear? Psalm 27:1-3.

YOUR ANSWER: _____.

9. How can you describe the joy of your new life here and now after "dying" with Christ? Romans 8:13-21.

YOUR ANSWER: _____.

There are indeed hard, stern battles with self, and endless conflicts. But the point is that the grace of Christ strengthens us. His cross must never be lost sight of! It actually makes our part easy.

Was His burden light in the Garden of Gethsemane or on His cross? No. He sweat drops of blood, yes, even His very heart was ruptured in His final agony.

The burden He says is "light" is simply His burden that we carry. The faith that works by love makes it light for us to carry, for we appreciate the heaviness it was to Him.

The only difficult thing in being a true Christian therefore is the choice to surrender self to be crucified with Christ. We are never called to be crucified alone—only with Him.

But, thank God, it is a million times easier for us to be "crucified with Christ" than it was for Him to be crucified alone for us! Behold the Lamb of God, and it does indeed become easy.

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."*

And even if this still seems hard, don't forget that it remains much harder to go on fighting against love like that and beating off the persistent ministry of the Holy Spirit, in order to be lost!

The "strait and narrow way" is not difficult—it is narrow, meaning that we cannot carry with us the world's baggage of selfishness. We must indeed "fight the good fight of faith," but it is precisely that—a fight of faith. While we continually "strive" and "pray without ceasing," we must also breathe without ceasing if we would live; but is that "difficult"? And we must eat, probably several times daily, as long as we expect to live—is that "difficult"? A healthy person breathes; "stretches" every muscle as a Christian "stretches every nerve." He eats because he's hungry, not because he has to. And he finds the constant exercise and activity to be joyous, much more so than being an inactive invalid.

10. Does your heart say "yes" to God's secret of life" _____

"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." 1 Peter 5:7 "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17