

LIVE LIKE YOU WERE DYING

(Phil 1:19-24)

Insights from Tim Nichols, Craig Wiseman (back), and the apostle Paul (below)

For I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

How do you live like you were dying?

- **Orient the PRESENT around something ETERNAL**

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting from each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. (John Dewey, *Experience and Education*)

- **Orient your LIFE around your DEATH**

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain

There is a tendency on the part of many people to avoid any serious discussion or even thought on the subject of death. Yet every person knows that in the normal course of events sooner or later that experience will happen to him. Every community has its cemetery. Nothing is more certain about life than the fact of death. It may be long delayed, but it will surely come. (Lorraine Boettner, *Immortality*)

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(Written by Tim Nichols and Craig Wiseman; Performed by Tim McGraw)

He said I was in my early 40s with a lot of life before me
 And a moment came that stopped me on a dime
 I spent most of the next days, looking at the x-rays
 And talking 'bout the options and talking 'bout sweet time
 I asked him when it sank in that this might really be the real end
 How's it hit you when you get that kind of news? Man, what'd you do? And he said

I went skydiving, I went Rocky Mountain-climbing, I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu
 And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying
 And he said, someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying

He said I was finally the husband that most the time I wasn't
 And I became a friend a friend would like to have
 And all of a sudden going fishing wasn't such an imposition
 And I went three times that year I lost my dad
 Well, I, I finally read the Good Book and I took a good, long, hard look
 At what I'd do if I could do it all again, and then

I went skydiving, I went Rocky Mountain-climbing, I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu
 And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying
 And he said, someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying

Like tomorrow was a gift
 And you got eternity to think about what you'd do with it
 What did you do with it? What did I do with it? What would I do with it?

Skydiving, I went Rocky Mountain-climbing, I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu-Man-Chu
 And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter and I watched an eagle as it was flying
 And he said, someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying

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THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

The Cloud of Unknowing is considered the greatest spiritual writing to emerge from the 14th century contemplative movement. The writer is anonymous. He is writing to a disciple who is learning to pray and now finds himself dealing with darkness in a patch of “unknowing.” He instructs:

The best thing you can do when you start to pray...is to tell yourself, and mean it, that you are going to die at the end of your prayer. I am not joking when I tell you this.... If you do, you will find that the combination of your general sense of your own unworthiness combined with this special feeling of how short a time you have left to make a firm purpose of amendment, will concentrate your mind wonderfully on a proper fear of the Lord.

Six centuries later, in *Spiritual Classics*, Richard Foster provided this amusing commentary:

We moderns are absolutely shocked by the counsel that as we start to pray, we should assume that we will die by the end of the prayer. What could be more out of step with the contemporary mood of self-actualization and self-affirmation? Of course, I would take that as a fairly strong argument in its favor. The notion of reflecting on our own demise is actually an ancient spiritual discipline. Its intention is to remind us in the most vivid way possible that God is the One in charge of our days. Our hopes and dreams are in his hands and not ours. As a result, we can at last lay down the crushing burden of trying to be CEO of the universe.... A well-reasoned reflection upon our demise will wonderfully clear the mind and purify the feelings.