

## “If I Should Wake Before I Die”

*“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep;  
If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.”*

Growing up, I didn't pray much. But I was taught this bedtime prayer. “If I should die before I wake...”. I'd like to do a play on those words and make it: “If I should *wake* before I die!” Are you and I really *alive*? Or just existing? Are we *turned on* by life?

***Life is short, isn't it?*** I'm \_\_\_\_ years old! I know most of my life is behind me. I say this not to be morbid, just honest. (And too, most of the men in my family haven't lived exceptionally long lives). I can't believe how the years have flown by. When you're young, you think you have all this time – but – poof! 1 Chronicles 29:15 says, “Our days on earth are like a shadow.” You see a shadow, then maybe walk away for while, and you come back to the spot, and the shadow is gone. James 4:14 tells us: “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” *Life is short! Our time on earth is limited and precious.*

Yet, how many today are bored. Dull people, living dull lives. The Weather Channel once commissioned a firm to do research on its viewers. It found that 1 in 5 people who watch The Weather Channel watch it for at least 3 hours at a sitting. The company calls these people “weather involved.” I call these people “people who need to get a life”! As a society we pay big money to athletes and entertainers to stimulate us, and keep us from being bored. Sure, many Americans are *busy* and *super active*. Yet often we're doing things we don't really enjoy, perhaps feeling trapped in routine – lacking enthusiasm and purpose for living.

The popularity of extreme adventures and thrill seeking today seems like an alternative to the boredom that many experience. “Survivor” type programs on TV. We seem to have a fascination with people living on the edge! Roller coasters are more and more pushing the limits of what our bodies can tolerate.

Isn't there something attractive about people who have a zest and a gusto for life! A few years back Redskins quarterback Gus Frerotte became so exuberant after scoring a touchdown on a 1-yard scramble that he butted his head against a padded concrete wall around the playing field, and had to be taken to a hospital with a self-inflicted neck injury. X-rays proved negative; he only sustained a sprained neck and wounded pride. (Now we may say he was idiot – but I find something winsome about such enthusiasm!).

***I believe God wants us to live life passionately, with energy and enthusiasm!*** Someone has pointed out that God poured everything He had into His creation! He made billions of stars. We probably don't need billions, but He made them anyway! God didn't create a black and white world; He made it in living color, with breathtaking beauty! He didn't make a couple of species of plants and animals. God went wild on this! A theologian of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Irenaeus, once said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” That's how we glorify God! Why just live out our days sleepwalking, going through the motions, settling for mediocrity?

Life is short. I'm thinking at the beginning of this New Year to make the most of the time i

have left, for it's going to fly by quickly! And so, **I want to be more passionate about life itself.** There is a Scripture that applies here. Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." This verse is sort of saying: Life is short; you're dead a long time! Ecclesiastes is probably the most cynical book in the Bible, but there is truth here! Don't be a *dead head* before you're even dead!

Now it is true, we can be enthused and energetic about life, but be off track! For instance, there's a lot of energy expended at a college fraternity party, where young adults are juiced up with beer and sexual attraction, but that's not what we're aiming for! There's a ton of enthusiasm at an Eagle's game, but Philadelphia Eagles fans aren't exactly majoring in good manners and politeness! I'm not recommending having a passion for doing bad things. But rather savoring God's gift of life and His amazing world, and pouring ourselves into something good and worthwhile!

Can you think of someone who's touched you, or inspired you, by their passion and energy and enthusiasm for living? I'm thinking of two biology professors I had in college. The first one taught at Millersville University. He was an amazing instructor, knowledgeable, interesting, passionate! He kept us on the edge of our seats just presenting the Latin names of plant species! Then I transferred to Elizabethtown College mid year. I took the second semester of biology. The class was large. We met in a spacious auditorium, and the professor simply gave us a dry lecture, mostly in a monotone. (Now Etown was and is a great school – but I can't say the same about the particular biology professor)!

Remember this man? Steve Irwin. I loved this man's passion for the animals in God's creation. He would revel in the beauty of poison spitting snakes. He relished toying with alligators!

Who would you rather be around? Someone who's colorless, a bore? Or a person with an enthusiasm and fervor for life, who relishes the opportunities life presents? *The world is shaped by those with a passion and a gusto for life!* Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it to the abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus didn't come to make us stuffy, and religious, and dull, but to give us *life!* "If I should wake before I die." Life is short. I hope and pray that I don't squander this precious gift of life.

***Secondly, in my time left, I want to be passionate about my faith.*** Dr. Greg Boyd, a pastor, and a college professor of theology, in a sermon, maintains that the #1 obstacle to Christianity is not New Age religions or cults, nor the decline of morals in our culture, nor the media (although all of these are formidable obstacles). The #1 obstacle Christians face is not something *outside*, but something *inside: boredom and apathy.* He says, "Christians that have just settled into a routine...they go through the motions. Christianity is just a little *part* of their life; it is *part* of what they do." But we don't give it a whole lot of thought or a whole lot of investment. Our faith isn't lived passionately. That's why, he says, if you ask unbelievers outside the church, "What do you think of the church?" one of the most common answers is: it's *boring!* Christians are boring, church is boring, sermons are boring, music is boring. "Christians are basically

normal people but they tend to live by a few more rules than other people do. They tend to be killjoys more than other people are and they are just a little more boring and a little more uptight to be around.”

There’s a lot of truth in what he says. A lot of us in the church are not *bad* people, just *bland* people! We are missing that zeal and fervor for life and for our faith! Then Greg Boyd asks: When did this happen? When did Christianity, in the eyes of unbelievers, become boring? If you look at the ministry of Jesus, He did a lot of things, but no one accused Him of being boring! Wherever He went He was ruffling feathers. There was an energy, a passion: He was living on the edge. One can say a lot about Jesus, but one can hardly accuse Him of being boring! There was a supernatural passion there!

Pastors get criticized a lot. This is true of anyone in a leadership role, or in the public eye. Sometimes being criticized or even attacked gets you down. Take sermons, for example. I’ve been criticized for some of the sermons I’ve preached. People don’t agree. People get upset over something I say. But in my eyes, that’s not the worst thing can happen. The worst thing you can say about my sermon is, “It’s so *boring!*”

When’s the last time you caused a stir, or got into trouble, because of your faith and your walk with Jesus? The trouble with most of us is that we just blend into the crowd, we go along with the culture, and never stir things up at all for the Lord’s sake!

One of the Scripture passage I love is found in the first chapter of Colossians. It describes the Apostle Paul’s zeal for his faith! It is Colossians 1:24-29 (especially verse 29): “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God’s commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.”

Notice the words “toil”, “struggle” “energy”. What does “this” in verse 29 refer to? In verse 25 Paul says he wants to make the word of God fully known. In verse 28 he tells how he wants to proclaim Christ, so he may present everyone mature in Christ. In one of my Bibles I wrote this notation, “Holy Energy”. Paul was energized, but it was an energy *God* placed within him! If we read the New Testament, we get the impression that the Apostle Paul was a ball of fire for Christ! He was always creating a stir, wherever he went, *but he often triggered a revival!*

If we’re Christians, how passionate are you, am I, about making the word of God fully known to the people God places in our lives? To have everyone become mature in Christ? I like what Romans 12:11 says: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” Christianity is more *caught* than *taught!* Often it is enthused, excited Christians who impact the world more than those with proper beliefs, but lacking passion for their faith.

“If I should wake before I die...”. Then too, ***I hope and pray we can have a passion for the Church, too.*** I’m thinking of one church I served, where God gave us significant growth – both in numbers, and in our faith and our outreach to the community and beyond. We did little paid advertising – just at Christmas. But the church kept getting new people! Why? Because people who were coming got excited about what we were doing, and they invited others to come!

Martin E. Marty is a well known and respected Christian intellectual. He once quipped that the average Presbyterian invites someone to church every 24 years! And Episcopalians every 28 years! I don’t know about United Methodists! He didn’t give any statistics on us!

I heard about a town in Georgia where there was this vivacious “young” woman in her 90’s! She lost her husband unexpectedly. Shortly after that, she was in a serious auto accident. These two events together threw her into a deep depression. Her family insisted she see a psychiatrist. Well, by the time she saw a psychiatrist, she was already feeling better. In fact, all she could talk about in the psychiatrist’s office was how excited she was about her church – the young people, the choir, the pastor, the new things happening. The psychiatrist was so impressed he decided to visit the church, along with his wife and three teenage children! All because some 90-something lady was excited about her faith and her church.

Who can tell what might happen if Christians really got excited about Jesus, and about what He’s doing in their church! Just maybe some of that enthusiasm will wear off and inspire someone else to come to church, and maybe come to Jesus!

Perhaps you’re wondering, “Harry, are you suggesting that we should be high energy, enthused, excited all the time?” Of course not. That’s not realistic. We all get tired. We get discouraged and depressed. We can’t be on an emotional “high” all the time (drug addicts seek that kind of unnatural experience!). I get discouraged and down. To be honest, some Sunday mornings when I leave the church, I get into car feeling down and deflated over the ministry here. There are times in our Visioning Team meetings where we share our feelings of discouragement – we have worked so hard to move the church forward, and at that moment we are seeing few results. But I see God at work here, and I am driven by a zeal and a passion to see us as a church being a beacon that draws people to Christ!

“If I should wake before I die”.....if I should ***wake up*** before I die! I pray that God will give me a passion for living, and soaking up the wonders of His amazing creation...an enthusiasm for my faith and sharing Jesus...and a “holy energy” to love and serve the Church!

***Are you fully alive? I want to be! Don’t you?***

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