

Dear Bob,

When I think about death, I get so confused. When Christians die, I know they go to heaven. But it still scares me to think about it. I'm afraid that if and when someone close to me dies, I'll just fall apart. What can I do?

Casey

Dear Casey,

Sometimes we just don't understand things! We struggle with what God allows to happen in our lives. But we need to remember that God does not cause bad things to happen. God is pure and holy! From Him only good can flow.

Sometimes God allows difficult events to take place in our lives so we can help others struggling through a similar situation. I'd like to share with you what happened in my heart when someone close to me died. Maybe it will help you.

As a youth leader, there have been (and are) young people who are very special to me. A few years ago there was one such young man. Time had built a relationship between us. God had allowed something special to happen.

This young man was working at being what God wanted for his life. He was growing physically and spiritually. He wasn't a "super-saint," but just a teenager committed to Christ.

In his first year of Bible college, this teenager was killed in an automobile accident. God called him home to heaven. When I heard the news, I really struggled with God's decision. I could think of many others He could have called. I let God know my feelings that night! I didn't sleep much as I wrestled with God's wisdom, grace, and sovereign will.

God directed me to a verse that has become very special to me.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15).

I like that. I drew much comfort from knowing that God counts each one of His saints as very precious. It is no light matter to Him when He calls one home to heaven.

There are no accidents with God. We can rest in this fact. Our holy, all-knowing, righteous, sovereign God IS in control!

Bob

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *Death*

Death isn't an easy subject to consider. But it can happen at any time. When someone close to you dies, the vacuum in your life is hard to fill. Only through Christ can you really find comfort, and be able to offer hope to others who hurt. This *Pathway* study gives valuable insights for facing hard times, both now and in the days ahead.

DAY ONE — Death

TODAY'S PRAYER: Death isn't an easy subject to consider. But it can happen at any time! Thank God that you are ready to meet Him in heaven. Ask Him to take away your fear of dying.

TODAY'S VERSE: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me (Psalm 23:4).*

Why, God?

Have you ever experienced the death of a close friend or family member?

A rainy Monday morning is depressing enough in itself. But what Mark experienced at the funeral home left him devastated. It seemed as though his whole high school junior class was there – girls and guys alike. Some were crying. Others held their feelings back, but sorrow showed in the eyes of even the most cool kids. Rich's family and relatives sat on chairs placed in front of the casket. Teens, however, crowded elbow to elbow in the back of the small room and spilled out into the lobby.

Mark was thankful for one thing. Rich had died instantly. Someone had run a stop sign and plowed into Rich's car. *It wasn't long and drawn out, Mark thought. They say he probably didn't even experience pain.*

A thousand thoughts flooded Mark's mind during the funeral service. *If only I hadn't argued with Rich that last time we were together. If only I'd taken a greater interest in him. Why didn't I share Christ with Rich? Will he be in heaven?*

But not all Mark's thoughts expressed guilt. To his surprise, Mark found himself thinking, *If Rich had paid more attention to me, I'd have treated him differently.*

Perhaps the most difficult question for Mark to face was directed toward God. "Why did You allow this to happen?" It didn't seem fair, and wasn't God supposed to be fair? Mark could understand why a person might die if he had been evil or had lived a really wicked life. Or maybe death would be easier to accept if a person had an incurable illness. But why Rich?

Rich's funeral bothered Mark, and in the next few days it began to affect his school work. He found it difficult to concentrate. Although he didn't want to think about either, he couldn't get Rich or God out of his mind.

Perhaps you, too, have experienced the death of a close friend or family member. If you have, recall your feelings and write them below. If you've never experienced the death of someone close to you, **write how you think you'd feel if a close friend or relative died.**

A Look In the Book: When someone dies, you may ask "Why?" a thousand times. The Bible doesn't always answer our "Whys?" Yet Philippians 3:13-14 offers counsel and encouragement. **Read these verses and write them in your own words.** (Note that "forgetting" means "not dwelling upon or worrying.") *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul advises us to stop dwelling upon what has already happened. This doesn't mean Mark shouldn't be sad. It doesn't mean he won't feel sorrow. But for Mark this does mean realizing that Rich is really gone. There's nothing he can do to change this. Yet, Mark can look to the future and consider what can be done now! Rich's death should awaken Mark to share Christ with his friends who are here today!

God won't always tell you why certain things happen. But He does say you can look to Christ and face tomorrow with Him at your side!

DAY TWO — Death

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God for courage to face the death of those close to you, if God brings such experiences into your life. Ask Him to help you love others with a Christlike love.

TODAY'S VERSE: *Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us (Psalm 62:8).*

Comfort in Christ

The day Tracy's boyfriend killed himself, they'd been fighting. She blew up and said she never wanted to see Andy again. Tracy didn't know that Andy had just been fired from his part-time job, his school grades were down, and his parents were getting a divorce.

At first, Tracy felt so upset that she just sat in her room and cried. She asked over and over what would have happened if she hadn't argued with Andy that day. But there was no answer for Tracy, and no way to bring him back.

Tracy finally found comfort when she came to know the Lord. Just before Christmas, she was invited to a church high school party. Within a few weeks, she received Jesus Christ as her Savior. In Him she found comfort and understanding of her grief and her feelings of guilt. She experienced love from her new Christian friends.

A Look in the Book: The verse that turned things around for Tracy in her new Christian life was Matthew 11:28. **Read this verse.** *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Then write two ways Jesus Christ might have provided "rest" for Tracy's heart and mind.*

1. _____

2. _____

Tracy felt guilty for being alive while Andy was dead. Then one day she read 1 John 3:16-21 and realized she should be using to the full the valuable time God was giving her. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

Write some ideas she (or you) might learn from these verses.

God has given Tracy time to serve Him. In the book of 1 John, she learned about the Christian laying down his life for the brethren. God may be working in Tracy's heart to help her understand how she can do that. At this point, God has not asked Tracy to give her life for a fellow Christian. But what about becoming friends with a girl at school who doesn't dress just right? Or, Tracy might spend this Saturday afternoon grocery shopping for her mom who has the flu.

One of the first Bible verses Tracy learned was John 3:16. *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

As Tracy thought about John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16, she realized that God was sharing something special with her. God was allowing her to demonstrate love for Him, even as He had shown His love for her!

Tracy would never forget her boyfriend. In fact, when she had opportunities, she'd explain how Andy's death forced her to seek comfort from God. When Tracy talked to someone angry with his or her parents, she'd attentively listen. She'd understand that people need to know the love and comfort that Jesus offers — before it's too late.

DAY THREE — Death

TODAY'S PRAYER: Discuss with God your need to rely on Him during the hard times of life.

TODAY'S VERSE: *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).*

Remembering the Good Times

“When I began talking about it, my sister’s death became easier to accept.”

There aren’t many things harder to cope with than death. But you can constructively face the fact that someone you care for is gone. Here are some valuable suggestions:

- Admit that the person has really died. Acknowledge that grief is real, and this experience is actually happening to you as well as to those around you. Death of friends and family members is a fact with which you have to deal. It’s tempting to avoid thinking about it, but the reality of death will not go away.
- View your feelings as natural, not something about which to be ashamed. Express your own feelings of guilt. You shouldn’t be embarrassed in telling someone how you feel, and how hard it is to face your loss. Don’t be ashamed to cry.
- Realize that God alone has the power over life and death, and He is sovereign. Nothing happens without His knowledge.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29-31).

- Constantly remind yourself that God knows how you feel! You can rely on Him.
Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you (1 Peter 5:7).
- Talk with your friends and family about the person who died. Reminisce about the good times you had together. At first, this may be difficult, but it’s always best. In this way, you comfort one another.

Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Sometimes feelings of loneliness, anger, anxiety, or fear may persist. If so, seek the help of your pastor, youth leader, parents, or another mature person in your church.

A Look in the Book: Because Jesus experienced victory over death, Christians don’t need to fear death any longer! **Look up the following verses. Write what they say about death for those who trust Christ as Savior, and why Christians don’t need to be afraid of death.**

2 Timothy 1:9-10: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

John 11:25: *Jesus said unto her, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”*

On My Own: *Talk to one of your parents, a youth leader, pastor, or even a friend who has experienced the death of someone close. Record his or her answers to these questions.* (Be sensitive to the grief and pain this person may still feel.)

What was the most difficult thing for you to face in losing your friend/family member?

How did you cope with the experience?

How did your Christian faith sustain and comfort you?



DAY FOUR — Death

Hiding It in My Heart: Spend an extra minute today and memorize this wonderful Bible promise. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life (John 6:47).*

TODAY'S PRAYER: Talk to God concerning your feelings about death for the believer. Thank Him for His wonderful gift of eternal life!

TODAY'S VERSE: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15).*

For Those Who Know Christ

Fifteen-year-old Christy sat silently in the church. Tears ran down her face, and her whole body shook. The service was a memorial for the mother of her best friend.

The Pastor spoke. "Anita Smith is gone from us for only a little while," he assured them. "Those of us who know Christ will someday see our friend in heaven and fellowship with her there. Death is difficult to accept, but death need not be feared. Christ conquered death for us."

The Pastor's words made sense to Christy and comforted her. She thought, *For my friend's mom who knows Jesus, death is only the beginning!*

Facing the loss of a Christian friend brings pain, but the promise of being together again encourages us and gives us hope for the future.

A Look in the Book: Ever since mankind's first sin in the Garden of Eden, man has experienced death. Probably none of us fully understands it. Yet, we know we must face death unless Jesus Christ returns for us before we die.

Read Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Write the verse in your own words.* It will be the foundation for today's study.

The first part of the verse tells the terrible result of man's sin. It would be difficult to accept that truth if it weren't for the end of the verse — the promise of eternal life.

Grab your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 which tells about hope for the believer. **Summarize the passage in your own words.**

Anticipating life forever with Christ has always been an encouragement to believers. In one of the very early books of the Bible, Job said: *"... I know that my Redeemer liveth ... and though after my skin worms [shall] destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).*

When Lazarus died, the New Testament tells that his sister, Martha, grieved for him. When Jesus asked if she thought her brother would be resurrected, she said, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus then said: *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die ..."* (John 11:25-26).

What do you think Jesus meant when He referred to Himself as the resurrection and the life?

When you, as a Christian, arrive in heaven, you'll have time for long talks with the Lord Jesus and with others who have gone before you! **Can you list a few other people you want to see when you get to heaven? After each name, write what you might discuss.**

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

DAY FIVE — Death

Hiding It in My Heart: Memorize this Bible verse today. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Rom. 5:12).*

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to make you see how important it is to witness to your friends and family. They need to know about the sacrifice of Christ and how it can save them from their sin!

TODAY'S VERSE:... *teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12).*

What About the Nonbeliever?

Is death really the end for those who don't know Christ?

Jim was a Christian. His cousin, Ben, wasn't. Yesterday Jim attended Ben's funeral. Jim was now 17, but he remembered playing with his cousin in younger days. Jim also remembered seeing Ben at their last family reunion. Now it was too late to tell Ben what he had wanted to say so often, but had failed to say. It was too late to tell Ben about Jesus Christ.

I'll never see him or talk to him again, Jim thought.

A Look in the Book: Sometimes it seems like God is unfair to not welcome everyone into heaven. Why is there a hell, anyway?

To examine this question, we need to look at how much God hates sin. He hates it so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross to be the sacrifice for our sin. He paid the penalty God demands for sin.

In Old Testament times, a man was required to offer animal sacrifices for his sin. But these sacrifices just covered his sins until the death of Christ. They didn't take away sin. Look at the following verses which tell us that Jesus is now our sacrifice for sin. Through faith in Him, we have eternal life in heaven!

Summarize each verse on the lines provided.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.

From the verses you just read, you might think that everyone will spend eternity in heaven because Jesus was the sacrifice for sin. But the Bible clearly tells us that is not the case. Now read these verses. They tell us that we must receive Christ through believing in Him in order to have His death count for us.

Summarize each verse.

John 3:7: Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

John 3:36: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Can you imagine being separated from God for all eternity? It's a horrible thought! That's why God has given us, as His children, the responsibility and privilege of witnessing to the unsaved. Then they, too, can receive Christ and someday join believers in heaven.

Put yourself in Jim's place at the family reunion before Ben died. **Using the verses you've looked up today, what would you have said to Ben to help him know how to be saved?**

DAY SIX — Death

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to make you more sensitive to needs of others. Ask Him to help you avoid finding fault, and rather offer comfort and guidance.

TODAY'S VERSE: *Blessed be ... the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).*

Comforting the Hurt

What would you say to someone overcome with grief?

Janice took it hard when her grandmother died. Although she knew Grandma was a Christian, and now in heaven, Janice still felt upset. She especially felt guilty for not spending more time with her grandma in the past few years.

Janice began to feel better after sharing her grief with a close friend. Janice talked and cried, and her friend listened. Everything was going better until her younger brother came to her for comfort. Although it'd been several weeks since the funeral, he still couldn't deal with Grandma being gone. He missed her, for she'd been a big part of his life. What are some things Janice could say to her nine-year-old brother to help comfort him?

A Look in the Book: Janice learned how to show compassion. Compassion is even more involved than sympathy. It's being sensitive to what others are feeling because you have felt the same way (or nearly so) yourself.

Read in Luke 7:11-13 *how Jesus empathized with a mother whose only child had died. And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, "Weep not."*

Yes, Jesus had compassion. He knew how to feel with those aching inside.

Read Psalm 34:17-18. *The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

What will the Lord do for the brokenhearted?

Now grab a Bible and read Psalm 139. There David writes of his assurance that God is always with him and will help him in all his problems. After reading the Psalm, answer these questions carefully:

How well does God know you (verses 2-6)? _____

Why can't you run away from God (verses 7-13)? _____

Are you willing to share with God all your thoughts and feelings? As you're in fellowship with Him, you'll be ready to follow His direction to care for and comfort someone else.

When you're close to God's heart, you can encourage and comfort others. Only by understanding His deep love for you, can you hope to share it with those who hurt.

Sometimes your silent presence is the best comfort for a hurting friend! Don't be too hasty to say, "I know how you feel." If you've never been in a similar situation, you probably can't understand the pain your friend is experiencing.