The Radical Disciple
by John Stott

Chapter 8: Death

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"I can't think of anyone who has been more effective in introducing so many people to a biblical world view. He represents a touchstone of authentic biblical scholarship that, in my opinion, has scarcely been paralleled since the days of 16th century European Reformers."

Billy Graham

Christian Discipleship: “Often Neglected” Characteristics

Chapter 1: Non-Conformity
Chapter 2: Christlikeness
Chapter 3: Maturity
Chapter 4: Creation-Care
Chapter 5: Simplicity
Chapter 6: Balance
Chapter 7: Dependence

Chapter 8: Death

A Selective List of Characteristics

“We have considered eight characteristics of those who desire to follow Jesus, and which together form my portrait of the radical disciple.

To be sure, I have been selective, and my selection has been somewhat arbitrary. Yet these are aspects of discipleship that I would like to see in every disciple of Jesus, and not least in myself. You will no doubt want to compile your own list. Hopefully, it will be clearly biblical, but still also reflect your own culture and experience, and I wish you well as you do so.”

Stott, p. 134
Taking Steps to Humility

1. Thank God, often and always... Thank God, carefully and wonderingly, for your continuing privileges... Thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.

2. Confess your sins. Self-examination and confession to God.

3. Be ready to accept humiliations... they help you to be humble.

4. Do not worry about status.

5. Use your sense of humor... laugh about yourself...

Stott p. 106. (quoting Michael Ramsey)

Chapter 8: Death

“The road to life is death”
- Salvation (Christ died that we may live)
- Discipleship (if we put to death the misdeeds of the body we will live)
- Mission (the seed must die to multiply)
- Persecution (dying that we may live)
- Martyrdom
- Mortality (physical death and eternal life)

“I have been reflecting much about these things. The end is in sight. I have been encouraged by the paradox of life through death.” (p. 128, par. 1)

Life Through Death

Read p. 114, pars. 1 and 2.

“The radical biblical perspective is to see death not as the termination of life but as the gateway to life.”

“In short, the Bible promises life through death, and it promises life on no other terms.”

“So the apostle Paul describes Christian people as ‘those who have been brought from death to life’ (Romans 6:13)”

For the context, read Romans 6:8-14.

Salvation

God’s gift is eternal life.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23)

“... God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have life”. (1 John 5:11-12)
**Salvation and Eternal Life**

“It’s also made clear that the distinctive feature of this life is **not its eternity but its quality** as the life of the new age. Eternal life is life lived in fellowship with God.

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Stott, p. 114, par. 3

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**Salvation through Christ’s Death**

So God came to us in Jesus Christ. He took our place, bore our sin and died our death. We had sinned. So we deserved to die. But he died instead of us.

But his death cannot do us any good unless we claim its benefits for ourselves. It is **by faith** inwardly and by baptism outwardly that we become united to Christ in his death and resurrection.

Stott, p. 115, par. 4,5

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**Salvation: Alive to God**

Read Romans 6:1-3, 8-11

Now therefore we must “count” or “reckon” ourselves “dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11) – **not pretending we are immune to sin when we know we are not**, but realizing and remembering the fact that, being one with Christ, the benefits of his death have come ours. We are “alive to God”, although through Christ’s death.

Stott, p. 115, par. 3

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**Salvation and Eternal Life**

The only way to enter this life is death. The reason for this is clear: the barrier to fellowship with God is sin, and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Throughout the Bible sin and death are coupled together as an offense and its just penalty.

So God came to us in Jesus Christ. He took our place, bore our sin and died our death. We had sinned. So we deserved to die. But he died instead of us.

Stott, p. 114, par. 4
Discipleship: Taking Up Our Cross

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:34-35

Discipleship: Crucified with Christ

Read Stott p. 116 pars. 2 and 3

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:13

Discipleship: A Life of True Fulfillment

... There is a kind of life which actually leads to death, and there is also a kind of death which actually leads to life. So if we want to live a life of true fulfillment, we must put to death (radically reject) all evil.

Stott, p. 117, last line

It is essential to make war against indwelling sin and not to come to terms with it.

Stott, p. 118, par. 3, line 5

An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:

There is no fear of God before his eyes.
For in his own eyes, he flatters himself too much to hate or detect his sin.

Psalm 36:1-2
Mission: A Kernel of Wheat

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified [on the cross].

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Those who love their life will lose it, while those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

John 12:23-25

Mission: Suffering and Sacrifice

... suffering is an indispensable aspect of mission.

Stott, p. 119, line 1

People receive life through the gospel, and those who preach the gospel faithfully suffer for it.

Stott, p. 120, par 3, last line

Examples:
Adoniram Judson (Stott, p. 121-122)
The Chinese Church (Stott, p. 122-123)

Persecution

The Apostle Paul was continuously exposed to the danger of death in Corinth

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

By no means are all beleaguered Christians repeatedly rescued from death as Paul was. Christians are promised neither immunity nor deliverance. Instead in the midst of death we can experience life.

Stott, p. 124, par. 3

Persecution: Both Death and Life

Read 2 Corinthians 4:10-11

... We are always sharing in our body in the death and the life of Jesus. Even while we are being afflicted physically, and made aware of our mortality, we can draw on the spiritual vitality of Jesus....

And although Paul cried out for deliverance, he was promised instead Christ’s power in his weakness.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
**Martyrdom**

Read Stott, p. 126, par. 2

A special honor will be accorded to [martyrs] in the new world (Rev. 20:4)

“Sir, your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying.” Josif Ton

“This is the end,… for me the beginning of life.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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**Mortality**

Read Stott, p. 128, par. 1 from line 6, “Having at the time of writing...”

“I have been reflecting much about these things.”

“Death’s central horror is oblivion—the terrifying absolute dying of the light... Death has dominion because it is not only the start of nothing, but the end of everything.”

Ronald Dworkin (Stott, p. 128)

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**Mortality**

But death holds no horrors for Christians. True, the process of dying can be messy and undignified and the decay that follows it is not pleasant. Indeed the Bible itself recognizes this by calling death “the last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

At the same time we affirm that “Christ Jesus... has destroyed death (2 Timothy 1:10). He has personally conquered it by his resurrection, so that it no longer has any authority over us.

**Mortality**

Consequently, we can shout defiantly:

Where, O death is your victory?
Where, O death is your sting? (1 Cor. 15:55)

Stott, p. 129, par. 1
Pictures of Eternal Life
The apostle John describes the people of God as

Having their names inscribed in the book of life (Revelation 3:5, 21:27)

Enjoying continuous access to the tree of life (Revelation 2:7; 22:2) and


Stott, p. 129, par. 3

New Bodies
“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”
1Corinthians 15:35
Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-44

“Furthermore, what is true of the resurrection body will in some way apply to the new heaven and new earth.... The whole creation is going to be liberated from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:18-25)

Stott, p. 130, par. 2

Mortality: “Far Better”
Reflecting on death and seeking to prepare for it, I have constantly returned to what one might call Paul’s philosophy of life and death:

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If 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! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”
(Philippians 1:21-23)

Stott, p. 130, par. 3

Mortality: “Far Better”
Read p. 131, pars 1 and 2.
“In one word, life meant Christ to Paul... So it was truly logical that he should want to die because death would bring gain, namely more of Christ.”

The life to come will be “far better” than life on earth... in worship, truth, beauty, fellowship and rejoicing

Read Stott, p. 132, par. 2.
**Glory of Life**

On the one hand we must not understate the **glory of the life** which is offered us in the gospel:

- Eternal life through faith in Christ
- Intensified life – putting to death the desires of our fallen nature
- Inward vitality in the midst of physical weakness
- Fruitfulness promised to those who are faithful in mission
- Comfort in persecution and prospect of martyrdom
- Final resurrection life in the new creation

Stott, p. 132, par. 4

**Cost of Death**

On the other hand we must not understate the **cost of the death** which alone leads to life:

- Death to sin through identification with Christ
- Death to self as we follow Christ
- Death to ambition in cross cultural mission
- Death to security in the experience of persecution and martyrdom
- Death to this world as we prepare for our final destiny

Stott, p. 133, par. 1

**Conclusion**

Death is unnatural and unpleasant. In one sense it presents us with a terrible finality. Death is the end. Yet in every situation death is the way to life. So if we want to live we must die. And we will be willing to die only when we see the glories of the life to which death leads. This is the radical, paradoxical Christian perspective. Truly Christian people are accurately described as “those who are alive from the dead.”

Stott, p. 133, par. 2

**Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** Psalm 90:12

**Show me, O LORD, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life.** Psalm 39:4

**He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.** Ecclesiastes 3:11-12