

The Trailhead | 11 October 2025

Death to Life

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Five funerals in eighteen months. Two babies, a toddler, a teenager, and a 60-year-old father of nine. The sadness, the hugs, the commiseration, and recognition of a common mortal lot feels starkly familiar. The endless loop of unfair suffering and separation is spinning up. We stand and sit in sad circles waiting on hope and comfort. The choreography of grief takes time.

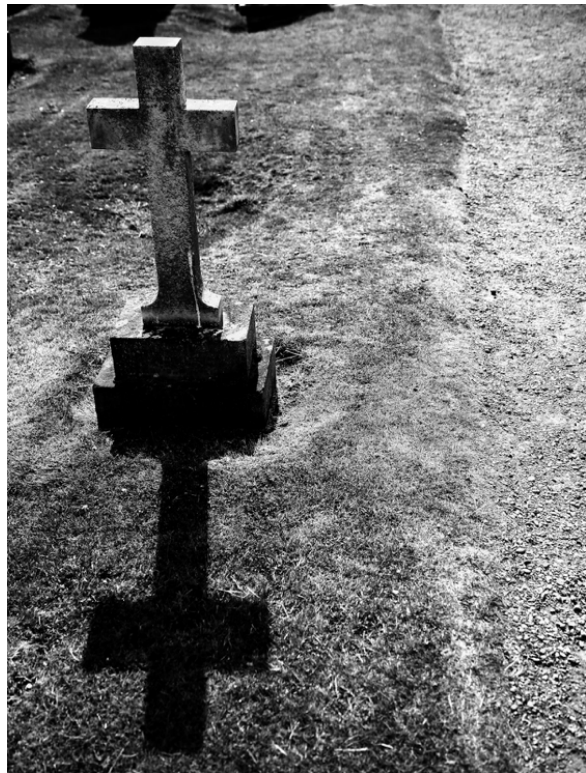
A teenage brother in the church was viciously attacked by a cancer that took him piece by piece. Inexorable, implacable, ruthless. Death consumed life.

A friend found her toddler asleep in his crib but he wasn't asleep, he was gone. Sudden catastrophic separation.

My cousins' baby died before she was born. Their plans and preparation devolved to the cold ground of empty arms.

My brother-in-law's baby was born at 22 weeks. He lived for thirty minutes but his lungs were unable to cope with this harsh earth. The same air and light we live on was fatal for him. His perfect tiny form returned to the dust we came from.

My sister-in-law's father was slowly but inexorably taken by cancer, that dreaded but familiar uncontrolled cell growth, caused by unknown, micro gene mutations. All of us die, but when we die before our time something breaks inside of those left behind.



Life is hard. Relationship stress from my selfishness and blindness causes separation that feels like death. We break everything. We go around and around over the same ruts in the past and present, fearful of the future. Light and hope seem distant and impossible. Self-reflection is a slow, grinding process.

I used to think problems improve with time and faithfulness, but reality only gets harder and more complex. Avoidable mistakes and unforced errors accumulate and icons of beauty shatter. Grief about the past and present replaces joy with gloom. The devil lurks to capitalize on disaster by inserting doubt and evil in weak spots. When the church falters and my friends leave my heart hurts. This is not God's plan. God is life, strength and unity, not death, defeat and separation. These are the marks of evil and sin. Evil and sin that is my fault. I am the reservoir of selfishness, rebellion and death that causes this tightening whirlpool.

At last the coffin is lowered into the earth. Faithful men have prepared everything behind the scenes. The pall bearers take up shovels and gently, slowly, move dirt to cover the coffin. Slowly everyone takes turns shoveling dirt and committing the body to the earth. The hole is filled and a mound of dirt rises to mark the spot. A marker is placed and at last the choreography of death is complete. There is nothing left to do but to pay our final respects to life passed on.

Suddenly, many long stemmed roses are passed out to the living children and they lay them across the grave of their dead brother. Roses that symbolize love, life and hope in the face of death and grief. Beautiful fragrant roses incongruously crisscrossed in white contrast.

Beauty and peace fill the calm after the storm. The finality crushes and uplifts and gradually absorbs the tears.

What is this ritual of burying the dead deep in the ground, marking the spot with flowers and headstones? Do we expect to see them again?

The promise is, though weeping and sorrow are here now, but "Joy comes in the morning." God told Jeremiah: "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This is still true in the dark times.

Life comes in seasons. Times of grief give way to times of hope. As surely as life resolves in death, death renews into life.

In I Corinthians 15 Paul is exploring the theme of resurrection. Finally in verse 50 he launches into a triumphant crescendo of victory, and in verse 55 taunting death and the grave.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Despite appearances of futility and emptiness, death is defeated and hope is ascendant. Victory is not to the strong or swift but to those who persevere. The mark of a righteous victor is not a flawless life but the grit to stand again and keep going through hard change. God is standing with us and feels our pain. He is not on the other side handing out death and defeat to test us. Separation and death come from evil and sin but God restores to life and hope.

Our puny efforts are “not in vain in the Lord.” Sterling lived thirty minutes but the impact of his life is profound. He touched our lives in an amazing way and the thought of meeting him in eternity stiffens our spine and stabilizes our trust in God. God specializes in the resurrection of death to life, hope from ashes, evil into good. The impact of evil and death leaves us breathless and beaten but, life is not in vain. Even thirty minutes is not in vain.

Here's to you, Sterling.

Aaron, his wife Emily, and 5 daughters live near Grangeville, Idaho. He spends most of his days at his post and pole mill, but his family is definitely top priority. He enjoys taking advantage of the rivers near them by fishing, camping, and picnicking with his family. Other interests are reading, singing, and eating popcorn. Aaron can be contacted at aaronemilyt@gmail.com.