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A View of Death

Written by Bill Perkins

While speaking at the commencement exercise at Stanford University on June 12, 2005, Steve Jobs said this:

"When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: 'If you live each day as if it was your last, some day you'll most certainly be right.' It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" And whenever the answer has been "no" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

"Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

The Day of Death Is Better

Last week, after battling cancer for seven years, Steve Jobs died. One day you and I will also die. Considering this reality isn't morbid. Indeed, it can add meaning to our lives, as it did for Jobs. In Ecclesiastes 7:1, Solomon said, "The day of death is better than the day of birth."

Initially his words confused me. But as I contemplated their meaning I realized one way they are true. The day of birth is always filled with unrealistic hopes for the future. When an infant fills his lungs with air and lets out that first primal scream his act doesn't trigger any deep thoughts in those present. They may celebrate, but they won't contemplate. We're too filled with happiness and dreams about the new life that just entered the world.

The Window Is Closing

The day of death however is better than the day of birth because it forces us to think deeply about our own demise. As I age I sense the window of life closing. Statistically speaking, I'm running out of time. And nothing makes me realize how little time I have left than for someone I don't even know, like Steve Jobs, to die.

My Friend Glenn

The reality of my own mortality is driven home more deeply and with stronger feeling when someone I know and love dies--like my friend Glenn Rose who died unexpectedly in October, 2008. We had made a trip to New York earlier that year. And now he's gone.

Who Am I Living For?

One question I consider as I reflect on my future death is this: Who am I living for? Am I living for people I don't even know? People who won't miss me when I'm gone? Am I living for success? Or, wealth? I believe I want to live my life for God. But I also want to live it for those who love me, those who will cry when my body is planted in the ground--or cremated and my ashes are tossed into the wind--dust particles to one day be captured by God and again breathed to life.

Yes, I want to live for my wife, three sons and two grandchildren. I want to live for my friends who will weep when I die and whose death will release my tears. And I want my life to please God.