

An Atheist Asks the Question:

**“Ray, are you afraid of dying?”**

This is perhaps the shortest of questions I’ve been asked, but I will probably give it one of my longest answers, because it’s a question with which every sane person wrestles. So I will be thoughtful and very candid with my answer.

The quick response is “Yes, I am fearful,” and “No, I’m not.” I am not afraid of dying, but I am afraid of the *process* of dying (as I have noted that a number of atheists have also said).

When I turned 20, I was shocked. It took me by surprise. I loved being a carefree teenager, and it was suddenly gone.

When I turned 40, I was quietly horrified. People who were 40 were “middle-aged.” They were balding, pot-bellied, and it seemed to me that they were past the exciting adventure of life.

But when I came to 60, I was quietly philosophical. I’d had time to give this one much deep thought.

There are some good things about getting old. It means that we can enjoy those good old black and white movies again and again, for the first time.

There is also the blessing of *being* around to turn 60. I have friends that didn’t even make it to 50. One was killed in a bus accident. It rolled on him. Another drowned in shallow water when he hit his head on a rock. Another was killed in a plane accident. Others went with cancer. Most of us know someone that cancer took in their youth, or someone who tragically died in a car accident. When a friend, loved one, or a famous celebrity dies, their death makes us think about our own death—even if it is just for a time.

When the Beatles sang, “When I’m 64,” I’m

sure they never thought for a moment that two of them wouldn't even get to 64. The presumptuous "when" never came. One went quickly with a bullet, the other slowly with cancer.



*Michael Jackson. Died at 50.*

Every year 40,000 unfortunate Americans are killed on the roads, around 18,000 are murdered, and hundreds of thousands die of cancer and other terrible diseases.

Then there are those who die in warfare. Millions have been cut off in their 20s with a bullet or a bomb, and the majority of those didn't even experience the joy of having kids, let alone growing old.

That's my short list of good things I can think of for the twilight years. Now for the long list of bad things.

## The Decade

I was very aware that in December, 2009, when I turned 60, I entered the decade of loss. I knew that I would lose any semblance of youthful looks that I had left. Any muscle-strength I had, would quickly diminish. My skin would become loose and lifeless. My eyesight would go. So would my hearing, thought-process, memory, and taste buds. My immune system would also weaken and make me vulnerable to a stack of terrible terminal diseases.

These depressing things happen to everyone, despite regular exercise, daily juicing, vitamins, and consuming a careful diet. No one can beat this rap. I knew that all this and much more would come in 20 years or so, if death didn't come to me first through a heart attack or aneurysm or a 101 other unexpected surprises.



*Patrick Swayze.  
Died at 57.*

So “the process of dying” isn’t a matter of a few weeks on a hospital death-bed. It escalates over 20 or so years.

In one of Spielberg’s memorable movies (if my memory is to be trusted), the aging process happened to one evil character in an instant of time. He had to choose the cup from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper (the Holy Grail). He believed that if he drank from it, he would live forever. He quickly grabbed the most attractive golden cup and began to drink. He wasn’t perceptive enough to realize that Jesus was a lowly carpenter and would have had a simple and humble wooden cup. The moment he took it to his lips, he aged from a healthy 40-year-old to 100 years, to a dry and dusty skeleton that crumpled to the ground.

The immediate outlook in life for any of us (even for the most optimistic of positive thinkers and health-conscious juice drinkers—whether he is a Christian or an atheist) is pretty gloomy.

So, am I afraid of this process of dying? Part of the answer is that I’m about as afraid as a faith-

ful soldier as he goes into a battle, from which he is certain he will not return. His is a natural and understandable human emotion, because he loves life and deeply values those he loves. Only a shallow-thinking person would have no fear.

### **The Exciting Part**

But here now is the most important and exciting part of my answer. Almost every skeptic makes a huge mistake when it comes to the issue of faith. He thinks that a Christian is someone who believes in the existence of God despite an overwhelming lack of evidence. That's why he chooses to be an unbeliever. He never seems to be able to differentiate between intellectual faith and implicit trust.

Let's say I step into an elevator on the 84th floor of a massive high-rise. I have just entrusted my life to it. Any apprehension I have will be in proportion to the trust I exercise. If I have no trust in the elevator, I will have a ton of fear. If I have absolute trust, I will have no fear at all.

The ingredient that makes the difference be-

tween the two states of mind, is knowledge. If I have knowledge that the elevator is state-of-the-art, is computer operated, is daily checked, and I believe that knowledge, my trust will grow.

But if I personally inspect the 12 three-inch thick unbreakable steel cables that hold each eleva-

tor, my trust will grow more. If I understand that the computer system has a back up, and immediately shuts down the elevator and calls inspectors at the first hint of trouble, my trust will grow even greater. The more trust I have, the less fear will have room to plague me.

However, if I choose not to believe what I am shown about the computer system, the cables, the inspections, etc., I will be left to be plagued with my fears. My trust in the elevator is a choice, based on knowledge that is simply believed. Re-



*Elvis Presley.  
Died at 42.*

member, that knowledge I have is more than a belief that the elevator exists.

So when it comes to the issue of God and salvation, the die hard skeptic disqualifies himself before he even begins. By choice, he refuses to intellectually believe that God exists, despite the overwhelming and axiomatic evidence of creation and the moral nature of the God-given conscience.



*Buddy Holly. Died at 23.*

So if you truly believe that God doesn't exist (which I doubt), you may as well stop reading at this point, because you are in the category of what the Bible calls "unreasonable." But for the reasonable skeptic who understands that his existence is indeed hopeless

(in the truest sense of the word), there is a wonderful hope. So please stay with me. Just keep in mind that it is essential to make sure you under-



stand that the trust a Christian has in God, is not the belief that He exists.

Here's how the trusting-Christian deals with his fear of death. He has experiential knowledge of God and He totally believes that God cannot lie. He knows that He is morally perfect. That means that He is without sin. As

the Scripture says, "In Him is no darkness at all." The 18-mile-thick unbreakable titanium cables of His promises are absolutely worthy of the Christian's trust. There is no doubt of that. The believer knows the reality of the verse "He is faithful who promised." When fear comes, it cannot get past this knowledge and that results in trust. Such trust comes as a gift from God at the point of conversion. It is part of the new birth of John chapter 3.

The more the Christian trusts the promises of God, the less fear he has. The two are incompati-



*Chris Farley.  
Died at 33.*

ble. That means that the trusting-Christian can say with the Apostle Paul, “I know and believe and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him (my life) against the Day (Judgment Day).” He is saved from death and the terrible consequences of his sin.

### **Alone with Fears**

That leaves the faithless skeptic alone with his fears. He has refused knowledge of the faithfulness of God, so he is left with certain tormenting uncertainties. Often, his pride will never permit him to admit that he has any fears, but they will come. He doesn't realize that “fear has torment” as the Bible says. He has forgotten what it is like to wake up after a terrifying nightmare. Sometimes it takes about ten minutes after waking up just to shake off such gripping fears. And when it comes to the subject of trust in God, the unbeliever has no power to stop fear from gripping his very soul to the core, because he refused the antidote of faith.

The seed of fear torments with a question. It

whispers, “What if?” What if Jesus spoke the truth and that God does consider lust to be adultery? What if He does see hatred as murder? What if He has seen and remembered every single secret sin, and every sinful imagination of the heart? What if Hell does exist? What if that silly little anti-science, money-hungry, lying, stealing fanatical banana-man-idiot-preacher was actually speaking the truth?

Millions know what it is to be paralyzed by a tormenting fear. It drives them to insanity, to drink, and it even drives many to suicide to escape its torment. If you are so unwise to leave yourself without faith in Jesus, you will not be able to stand against it. The Bible calls death “the King of Terrors,” and I have seen it terrorize one man who rejected God. It is fear-



*Marilyn Munroe.  
Died at 36.*



*Steve Irwin. Died at 44.*

ful to see, but much, much worse to experience.

So, whatever you do in this precious life of yours, don't reject the Savior and die in your sins. God has made the way to be saved very simple. He says that each of us is in terrible danger, and He kindly provided a way for us to get what we don't deserve. That's called "mercy." We can avoid the reality of a justly deserved Hell, and instead have the undeserved gift of everlasting life. But whatever you do, don't get "religious." Don't try and clean up your life. You and I are like the thief on the cross. He couldn't go anywhere, he couldn't do anything. He was pinned to the cross by the unforgiving nails of Roman civil law. All he could do was turn to Jesus and say, "Lord, remember me...."

In the same way, we can't do anything to save ourselves, because we are condemned by the merciless Law of God. All we can do is turn to Jesus

and say, “Lord, remember me....” The moment you come to know Him as Lord and trust Him as Savior, you will forever banish any “What if’s.” Again, this is because faith comes as a gift from God. He will give you faith. He will help you in your unbelief by giving you a new heart and new desires. You will want to love, trust in, and obey everything God would have you to do. And a total trust doesn’t allow any fear, in the light of the knowledge of God. Fear is for unbelievers.

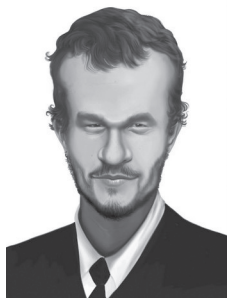
Always keep in mind that the most important moment of your life will be the instant of your death. Don’t be like the man who neglected his eternal salvation. Jesus said that God said, “You fool. Tonight your soul shall be required of you.” In other words there’s a debt that has to be paid. Hell required him. Death wanted its wages.

### **The Right Cup**

If you are considering these thoughts, please don’t worry about what your unbelieving friends or family think. Worry about what God thinks. If they are your friends, they will respect you no

matter what you believe. But if they turn on you like a pack of viscous hyenas, they were never your friends in the first place. You will have lost nothing.

Your life is without price, and you will lose it without the Savior. Seek Him with all of your heart. Jesus suffered and died on a cruel cross



*Heath Ledger.  
Died at 28.*

so that God could extend mercy towards you. He rose from the dead so that you could live free from the fear of and the power of death. His gift to you is eternal life. Such is God's love for you. Do you believe that? For your sake I hope you do.

So make sure you choose the carpenter's cup. Choose to trust Jesus Christ. Confess and forsake your sins and willfully put your reliance (your trust) in Jesus right now, and you will come to know Him whom to know is life eternal. If you don't think you have sinned,

look at the Ten Commandments for a few moments. They certainly helped me see that I needed a Savior. Let's do that now. How many lies have you told in your life? Ten, twenty ... more? Have you ever stolen anything, irrespective of its value? Have you used God's name in vain? We may not think that these sins are serious but God does. They are so serious, in His eyes they demand the death sentence. This is the verse that nailed me: Jesus said, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Have you looked with lust? So, will you be guilty on Judgment Day? If you have done those things, God sees you as a lying, thieving, blasphemous adulterer at heart. There is no nice way to put this, but if you have done these things, the Bible warns that you will end up in Hell. That's the bad news.

Here now is what I heard on the night of my conversion, way back in 1972. God, who the Bible says is "rich in mercy" sent His Son to suffer and die on the cross for guilty sinners. We broke God's Law, but Jesus paid our fine. That means

He can legally dismiss our case. He can commute our death sentence: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* Then He rose from the dead and defeated death. Please, repent (turn from sin) today and God will grant everlasting life to all who trust in Jesus. Then read your Bible daily and obey it.

I can't express to you what a joy it is to me, what amazing consolation, what an absolute hope I have in Christ. Death has lost its sting completely. This is how Scripture explains it:

*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

(2 Corinthians 4:16-18)



You had no choice to be born. You just found yourself alive. You had no choice *where* you were to be born. You just found yourself in a certain country, speaking a certain language. You didn't choose your looks or your personality. But this day, God Himself will enable you to make a choice when it comes to your eternal destiny. He will give you repentance. (See 2 Timothy 2:25.) Will you seek God or won't you? Choose wisely. You have only one chance at life. Don't blow it.

### **Do it Today**

To receive the gift of eternal life, again, you must repent of your sins (turn from them), and put on the Lord Jesus Christ as you would put on a parachute—trusting in Him alone for your salvation. That means you forsake your own good works as a means of trying to please God (trying to bribe Him), and trust



*James Dean.  
Died at 24.*

only in what Jesus has done for you. Simply throw yourself on the mercy of the Judge. The Bible says that He's rich in mercy to all who call upon Him, so call upon Him right now. He will hear you if you approach Him with a humble and sorrowful heart.

Do it right now because you don't know when you will take that leap through the door of death. Confess your sins to God, put your trust in Jesus to save you, and you will pass from death to life. You have God's promise on it. Don't insult Him by not believing what He says. Pray something like this:

**“Dear God, today I turn away from all of my sins [name them] and I put my trust in Jesus Christ alone as my Lord and Savior. Please forgive me, change my heart, and grant me Your gift of everlasting life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”**

Now have faith in God. He is absolutely trustworthy. Never doubt His promises. He is not

a man that He should lie. The sincerity of your prayer will be evidenced by your obedience to God's will, so read His Word (the Bible) daily and obey what you read. Read John 14:21 over and over until you understand what it says. This is the key to the reality of your faith.

Then go to [www.livingwaters.com](http://www.livingwaters.com) and click on "Save Yourself Some Pain." There you will find principles that will help you grow in your faith. You might like to get *The Evidence Bible*, which answers 100 of the most common questions about the Christian faith. Its informative commentary will help you to grow as a Christian. Thank you for reading this booklet.

