

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

May 28, 2020



To die is...?

I've had several “harrowing” experiences in my life. Some of them are fodder for future Daily Views, possibly, but here's a quick list: I've had live 50mm machine gun rounds go over my head (in the Army); I had a loaded gun pointed at me; a car ran through a red light and came within inches of slamming into me; my '67 Firebird did a 360 in the rain on the 405 Freeway; I also spun out in the fog and collided with another car; a car ran into me when I was riding my Honda 50 motorbike and I flew off the bike and hit his windshield; a policeman stopped me and, for a few minutes, I was mistaken for someone who had committed a hit and run in a car similar to mine; at the prison, an inmate's cell door open after all the doors were supposed to be locked; I was all alone and had no idea where the inmate was; when skin diving, a huge mana ray suddenly emerged from the sand below and almost gave my 21 year old heart a heart attack; I took wrong turn on a ski slope once and found myself alone at the bottom of ravine, right before closing time of the ski area.

That's just a fraction of the times I have been genuinely afraid. It doesn't account for times I've been uncertain about an outcome of a medical issue or fearful about someone else's health or the safety of my kids and grandkids.

Of all the fearful things I've faced, however, a year's worth of panic attacks was the worst. If you've never dealt with anxiety attacks, I'm happy for you. For me, the worst part of it was the frequent feelings of doom, especially at night; you're afraid to go to sleep because you think you'll die the minute you close your eyes. I suffered with these for a solid year, but, unlike today, people back then would say, “it's all in your head.” That made you ashamed to even mention it.

The doctors at that time had no answer; there was no remedy available because it wasn't a “real thing.” All they did was sign me up for a “relaxation” seminar. I did go, but as I was

sitting there, listening to a nurse speak in hushed tones, I felt a strong urge to get out of there — and I did. If you suffer from panic attacks, crowds are not your friend.

Since the medical community had no answers for me, I did some research on my own. I found a book in a used book store that helped. The author's advice was that when a panic attack hits you, name it; say to yourself, “OK, this is not a heart attack or some terrible disease — it is a panic attack.”

That actually helped, but something else helped much more. Since the worst part of the anxiety was the feeling of doom and the fear of death, I decided to say to myself, “so *what if I die?*” I stopped fearing death. I began to adopt Paul's attitude, expressed in Philippians 1:21, “*For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.*”

I ramped up my courage at one point a few years after I dealt with panic attacks, and mentioned it in a sermon. I was shocked at the number of people who told me, at the door, that they were dealing with the same issue. I even got phone calls from Christians from other places asking for advice.

There is a lot of anxiety over this virus and that's understandable and reasonable, up to a point. But a Christian's perspective should be different than the world's. We should be able to say, “to die is gain.” The psalmist assured us: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15).

We do what we can to preserve life so we can serve others; but should we fear death? Paul didn't; he said, “even if I'm poured out as a drink offering... I am glad and rejoice...” (Philippians 2:17).

“To die is gain.” It seems to me that the degree to which we agree with that or not says a great deal about us.