

“An Authentic Journey”
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We place our trust in science for so many things to help us stave off death, and it does a remarkable job in doing that. I was just reading about the technological marvels taking place just in the last year, 2016. It was amazing to me. They talked about different examples: The first one is an augmented reality. Novartis Chief announced that there are now digital contact lenses that were invented in 2016, or came out in 2016, that were patented by Google, that allows you to measure your blood glucose levels through your tears and that will help with changing diabetes treatment and management. There won't be the poking and prodding in quite the same way. It can all be done by just wearing contact lenses that many of you already wear today. Amazing.

There is near artificial intelligence in radiology: IBM's Watson supercomputer. We have heard about that before. Their supercomputer is now used in oncology units to assist medical decision-making. Now if you have, for example, a diagnosis of lesions of some kind, and you want to find out if they are cancerous, they can place this [lesion sample] on [the screen] and take a picture of it, scan it and send it off to [the] Watson supercomputer, and it will decide whether or not those lesions are cancerous. So you don't even need a radiologist anymore. The computer will tell you whether you have it [cancer] or not. It will save time, money and doctor care. Then they [doctors] can focus on more important things that the computer cannot do itself.

The next one totally amazes me: 3-D bio-printing. Now, we have heard about 3-D printers and they can make little car parts and so on, but what is amazing to me is that a company named Organovo successfully bio-printed liver tissues in 2014, and they seem to be within 4-6 years away from printing liver parts for transplantation - printing on a 3-D printer, bio-printer. The first bio-printers could be used in the pharmaceutical industry so that they could test on 3-D livers' toxicity with their medications instead of using animal livers. I found that interesting. But, within the next decade, they feel strongly that printing an actual liver tissue for transplantation could become a commercial service, and change the way people are cared for. It would help with rejection issues and availability. [It's] Amazing, what we are now able to do. No wonder science has made us feel like we can almost become gods - and that is what I want to get into again.

I saw an amazing article by a woman named Emily Dreyfuss, entitled “Silicon Valley would Rather Cure Death than Make Life Worth Living,” I thought that was an interesting idea and an interesting article. She draws it based on the fact that Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, and his wife, Priscilla Chan, I think out of the goodness of their hearts, are donating \$3 billion to help obliterate human disease. \$3 billion to obliterate human disease! And, if you obliterate human disease, you are well on your way to keeping death at bay for 100 or more years. So, instead of living to be 80 or 85, you could be living to 180 or 185 years, if there was nothing to get in the way like disease.

Now, among the many crusaders for this idea is Pay Pal co-founder and Trump advisor Peter Thiel, who aims to end mortality. The Alphabet Company, as a whole, has an entire company devoted to curing the most intractable of inconveniences: death. That is their goal

and they aren't that crazy. I mean, since the beginning of the 19th century, we have continued to increase our ability to stay alive exponentially, and the way we have provided opportunities to get cured.

Three hundred years ago the average life expectancy for a man was about 45-50 [years] and for a woman it was about 30 [years], because so many died in childbirth. Now, women are living longer than men, and we are living well into our 80s and 90s. This congregation, up until two years ago, had two women in the church - one who was almost 105 and the other 107 years old. They were running around like kids. It was amazing.

Look at what we are doing. But I wonder, is trying to stave off death the journey we should be taking? Is that the authentic way to serve this world in God's name? Because \$3 billion would go a long way in a number of other situations. Is staving off death more important than feeding the Third World? Is staving off death more important than providing water in the Third World, which will someday be more scarce than oil? Is staving off death more important than caring for this world that we are living in now? If you are rich, staving off death is important because you will be able to enjoy the fruits of all that you have created in your world. You will be able to enjoy it longer. And, if we are all able to live until we are 180 years old it's great, if you have the money to do that. But if you don't have the money to live until you are 80, how - in the name of all that's holy - are you going to have the money to live until you are 180? For every person who has the ability to live that long, how many people are going to suffer and die younger - because we all in this world cannot populate this world for that length of time? How are they addressing those issues?

Sony Corporation's Polytechnic Institute has a representative named Andrew Russell. He is their historian, and he said he is deeply concerned. He quotes, "It's distressing sometimes to see the amount of effort - not just human effort - but also rhetoric, to develop stuff that turns out to be apps and toys for rich people, when we could be focusing all of that attention in Silicon Valley on the important things;" like the 23rd Psalm talks about when it asks for quiet pools of still water. Where it talks about the grass, it is talking about food and water, the two things that sustain life for all people.

If we have all of these opportunities to extend life, I guarantee they are going to be expensive. And, if you don't already have health care, or your health care is being manipulated, how - in God's name - are you going to be able to get the stuff that is super expensive that will sustain your life?

You won't. As wonderful as I think the Zuckerbergs are in offering that money, I think they are mistaken because, no matter how hard they try, immortality is not going to occur; not because we don't have the ability; we human beings, in the next 100 years - and that is not that far away - will have amazing technical abilities. Think about 100 years ago, what our great-great-grandparents would have thought, if they saw all of the things we had today. They would be blown out of the water. We are going at such a pace, they couldn't keep up.

I was reading about a guy this week who was really sad. But he was enormously obese; he weighed 20 pounds shy of 1000 pounds. He had been in his apartment for years. He never left his apartment. He could barely move; home health came in and cared for him. He decided it was a 50/50 chance he'd die, but he decided - because he was going to die anyway - to get the stomach procedure. He lost over 700 pounds and, after months and

months, he went outside - after being from the apartment to the hospital and back - he went outside. He was blown away, after being in that apartment for so many years, by how fast the cars go down the road; how quickly people bustle from place to place.

I thought, if that man is that shocked after a decade or two, what must people have thought 100 to 200 years ago, if they could see us today. And what would we think, if we lived 100 years from now, about what this world is like? I don't think I want to keep up. I'm not sure I want to be alive 150 some years from now; but even if we are, at whose expense?

Yea thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Staving off death is another way of saying, "I don't believe in eternal life, that God, this mythical God is supposedly offering, so I'm going to have science create an environment where I can live as long as I possibly can or maybe even forever.

One of my favorite writers, Atul Gawande, in his book "Being Mortal" (wonderful book) said, "Funding improvements for palliative care - making people in extreme pain or at the end of their life more comfortable - would be much more meaningful to address, than the problem of death."

I don't think people would be scared of death nearly as much if we made it less frightening. Now I know many of you, like me, have sat with a loved one in the nursing home as we are waiting for them to die and, as wonderful as hospice is and as great as our medical care is, I have found very few people who don't suffer before they finally die.

I think there are ways, if we focused on it, to be much more humane in the way we cared for people, and help them die with dignity; but we have focused our energies in so many other ways. It is hard to even find a doctor to work with people who is trained in geriatric medicine.

It's kind of like trying to find a psychiatrist. It's awfully hard because nobody wants to go into it; because for so many physicians, death is considered a failure. But it shouldn't be. If you have lived a long, joyous life, death is a blessing - because we have taken everything we could get out of this world.

When I'm ready to die, I want to be so worn out, so exhausted, and my body so decrepit from working so hard and doing so much, that my body can't do one more thing. Then I'm ready to let go, so that God can make me new. It won't feel like I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death, because the Holy Spirit I believe, in that moment, will give me the comfort that I need.

How many times have I sat with someone - and I know you have, too - and they say to themselves, "I saw..." and it was a loved one who had already died. In that moment, all of their flailing and frustrations stopped, and they calmed down and fell into the loving arms of God. That is the definition of, "*Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*"

I believe God brings comfort through loved ones who have passed before, or through the Holy Spirit, somehow moving intimately with that person - guiding them from life in this world to life in the next.

The more we fight it - and I don't mean that we shouldn't fight to get healed, and do as much as we can to help people - but more of our focus needs to be helping people live healthy, whole lives on this earth, and not totally focus on immortality. Let God be about the work of immortality, and let each one of us be in charge of making sure that everyone else has the ability to live a life as healthy and joyous as our own.

We have talked a lot of about health care in the last week in this country; but, man, as frustrating as it is that we can't come to an agreement on it, look around this world at people who would beg for the health care we have. We have an obligation as a First World nation to make their lives a little easier. I'd love to see that \$3 billion dollars going out to people to make their health care and their living and their dying less painful; to give young people a chance to learn and get educated - rather than seeking after wanting to be God.

I pray that we will memorize and learn Psalm 90:12: *Teach us to number our days that we may gain a wise heart.* It's alright not to live forever on this earth, because even if I could live to be 300 years old, this place ain't ever going to be perfect. It's going to be full of injustice, this world we have made. It's going to be full of the have's and have not's. It's going to be full of pain, and discomfort, and frustration, because it is a corrupt world.

Why would I want to extend it another 100 or 200 hundred years?

I'll live in this world trying desperately to do what I can to make other people's lives easier, better and more faithful. But a part of me looks forward to have worn my body out so that I can fall in the loving arms of God - no longer having to fear the valley of the shadow of death, but to rejoice that I can go to God's Kingdom where there will never be sorrow or pain or loss ever again; where Heaven is not something we dream about, but a present reality; where I can feel the joy and never be sick; where no one else around me ever has to suffer again.

I would rather have that - and I think you would, too. And, I hope we think about that, clearly, because the last line of the 23rd Psalm is what we should focus on the most: *I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever more.*

Not dwell in Scott's house over on Davisson Avenue, at 150 years old, with 2 canes and a crabby life - with discomfort. You think I'm crabby at 50 [laughter], just wait until you see me at 150 [laughter]! (My poor daughter.) But the day I let go and fall in God's loving arms, if that's at 55 or 95 or 85, it doesn't matter, because life does not end in death, but continues in the resurrection for eternal life. Let that be our focus, and we will have an authentic journey.

Focus on what is true: Caring for our neighbor right here, right now, with whatever money we have, and let God worry about eternity. Let this be our prayer. And, in God's name may we trust. Amen.