

Life is Brief

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a prolific and influential composer during the musical period between 1730 and 1820 AD. He produced nearly 600 works of every category of music of his time. The world recognizes even now that his work represents the pinnacle of achievement. Many consider him the greatest classical composer of all time.

Mozart died in December 1791 at the age of 35.¹
Life is brief.

In the Genesis record of the patriarchs we read,

Genesis 5:5 So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, **and he died.**²

Genesis 5:8 So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, **and he died.**

Genesis 5:11 So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, **and he died.**

Genesis 5:14 So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, **and he died.**

Genesis 5:17 So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, **and he died.**

Genesis 5:20 So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, **and he died.**

Genesis 5:27 So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, **and he died.**

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Amadeus_Mozart

² All Scripture references are: New American Standard Bible, 1995. Lockman Foundation.

Genesis 5:31 So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, **and he died.**

- The common thread in all these verses is "...and he died."

The life span of the early generations of mankind extended to nearly a thousand years, but by the time of the Flood man's life had shortened considerably.

Genesis 6:3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

The psalmist lamented the brevity of life, and by the time that he wrote his psalm the expectancy had diminished significantly.

Psalm 90:10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,

Or if due to strength, eighty years,

Yet their pride is *but* labor and sorrow;

For soon it is gone and we fly away.

Seventy years is not a long time to live—ask anybody who is sixty-nine. But there are worse situations. There is the ageing disease.

Progeria is a disease that causes premature aging. The symptoms of the disease are: smallness of stature, loss of hair, wrinkled skin and other signs that we attribute to old age. The disease can age its victims ten times faster than normal.

A few years ago, in Orkney, South Africa, there was a youngster whose name was Fransie Geringer. At eight years old he was a full of innocence, laughter and mischief as any other youngster. But at eight years of age Fransie had the appearance of a man of eighty years. He was three feet eight inches tall, bald and skinny, and with a big head.

In spite of his sickness Fransie did not complain. He sat by himself at times, sometimes he climbed trees—he had odd looking hands; his brown eyes bulged; he had a spindly nose, and elephantine ears. He had to study his schoolbooks at home because his classmates teased him. Once he asked, “Why do I look so ugly?” His mother told him, “You are not ugly. You are a pretty boy.”

They said that every night, Fransie Geringer knelt beside his bed, clasped his aged fingers together, and bending over his Bible, prayed, “Dear Jesus, please make me big and strong.”

Regrettably, Fransie’s life was both brief and filled with sorrow. He died in 1989 at age 16.

Job said,

Job 7:6 “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,

And come to an end without hope.

7 “Remember that my life is but breath;

My eye will not again see good.

8 “The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer;

Your eyes will be on me, but I will not be.

9 “When a cloud vanishes, it is gone,

So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.

10 “He will not return again to his house,

Nor will his place know him anymore.

The psalmist wrote,

Psalm 144:3 O Lord, what is man, that
You take knowledge of him? Or the
son of man, that You think of him?

4 Man is like a mere breath;

His days are like a passing shadow.

Life is uncertain. Glory is brief.

A photo that appeared some time ago in Barron's Magazine shows Columbia University professor William Vickrey leaning against a marble column, basking in the attention of reporters and cameramen. He had just won the Nobel Prize for Economics, and would split \$1.1 million dollars with a British professor. The Nobel Prize is one of the most coveted prizes a scholar can win. It distinguishes him, and lifts his university into that rarefied air of worldly acclaim. Yet, only three days after the Nobel committee named him as one of the two winners of the Nobel Prize, William Vickrey was found dead at the wheel of his parked car. Vickrey, 82, had been honored with James Mirlees of Cambridge University for his work on "asymmetric information."

Earthly glory is brief.

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

Jesus told His disciples that their lives do not consist of their possessions,

Luke 12:16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones,

and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” ’

20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ 21 “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

There is the story of the clergyman who labored in West Bend, Wisconsin, who began a trip to a small town nearby to conduct the final services for a lady who was to be buried. It was a day when people traveled by horse and buggy. And so in this fashion the clergyman traveled. His horse was a high-spirited animal, and for reasons unreported, the horse bolted and ran, ignoring the protestations of his driver. The runaway caused the carriage to crash and to throw the clergyman from the careening carriage resulting in his instantaneous death.

As a consequence, the accident caused the funeral to be delayed. The delay in the performance of the funeral services allowed the woman who was to be buried to revive. The awakening happened two days after she had fallen into a coma and was presumed to be dead. The clergyman, however, did not revive, and they buried him in the grave that had been prepared for the lady whose funeral he was to preach two days before.³

Life is uncertain.

It was Ambrose Bierce who said, “To know that one will be hanged on the morrow does wonderfully focus the mind.”

³ Elon Foster, 6000 Sermon Illustrations, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1992. p. 419.

He was right. People going through life tend to think that their lives will go on indefinitely. It takes something traumatic to bring their focus back to reality.

In July 1983 an Air Canada 767 passenger aircraft, flight 143 from Montreal, Quebec to Edmonton, Alberta experienced total engine failure as the aircraft flew at 41000 feet. About an hour into the flight, and over Red Lake, Ontario, the huge airliner ran out of fuel mid-flight and effectively became a glider. There were 61 passengers and 8 crewmembers aboard.

Unfortunately, the loss of engine power also meant that the aircraft's transponder did not function and the aircraft could not be seen and tracked by the ground control systems. Frantic crewmembers prepared for the worst. With their options severely limited the pilots attempted to glide the plane to Winnipeg, but it turned out that Winnipeg was too far away for the airplane to fly without power. Instead, they diverted to what they thought was an abandoned military runway at Gimli. It was not abandoned and had been converted to a drag strip—and there were drag races that day.

Many uncertainties affected Flight 143. The outcome of the incident began more and more to look like a disaster. Under circumstances like these the passengers and crew were forced to focus their thoughts on what was most important to them. Pleasure, fame and wealth diminished in significance to the point where they mattered not at all. A witness said that they spent their remaining time writing last will and testaments, and messages to their loved ones.

To believe that one is about to die does wonderfully focus the mind.

In the case of Flight 143 it became evident to the pilots that in their attempt to reach the runway at Gimli that the aircraft was approaching the ground too fast. Unfortunately, they had no access to the airplane's speed brakes or the flaps, so the captain of the aircraft performed a rare maneuver. The maneuver is called a side-slip. In this he skidded his aircraft sideways through

the air to reduce the speed, and by this action he slowed the motion enough to land his plane at Gimli where only the nose-gear failed. The aircraft came to a stop and all passengers and crew exited the plane safely.⁴

They lived to tell about their experience, but you can bet that their view of life had changed.

At least two things can be taken away from a story about an air disaster. Life is uncertain, and life is short.

The Gift of God is eternal life in Christ.

The fear of death is a controlling influence in life. Christ came to liberate people from that control. The writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Adam's legacy is death, and there is no escape for the people who must struggle in the flesh. All the descendants of Adam will die. Yet we read in 1 Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

The Apostle Peter wrote that,

⁴ UTube, TheAviationChannel, Passenger jet runs out of fuel mid-flight, the Gimli Glider.

1 Peter 1:24 ... "All flesh is as grass, And all
the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers, And its flower falls away,
25 But the word of the LORD endures
forever." Now this is the word which by the
gospel was preached to you.

Alexander the Great, we are told, being upon his deathbed, commanded that, when he was carried forth to the grave, his hands should not be wrapped, as was usual, in the grave cloths, but should be left outside the bier, so that all men might see them, and might see that they were empty; that there was nothing in them. He was born to one empire, and the conqueror of another; the possessor while he lived, of two worlds, of the East, and of the West, and of the treasures of both, yet now when he was dead could retain not even the smallest portion of these treasures. The poorest beggar and he were at length upon equal terms.⁵

History says that Alexander the Great was ruler of Macedonia at age 16, victorious general at 18, king at 20—and then died a drunkard before age 33. He had conquered the then-known world, but not himself. This story is told about him: Alexander began a second night's carousal with 20 guests at table in Babylon. He drank to the health of every person at the table. After this, he called for Hercules' cup, which had a huge capacity. Filling it, he drank it all down, drinking to Proteas, a Macedonian in his company. Then he pledged to him again in the same extravagant cup, and instantly fell to the floor. He was fever stricken, and a few days later, he was dead.⁶

It is said that once the philosopher Diogenes looked intently at a large collection of human bones. These had been piled one upon another. Alexander the Great stood

⁵ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1547). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

⁶ Ibid., Tan, P. L. (1996) (p. 121).

nearby. He became curious about what Diogenes was doing and so he asked. Diogenes replied, “I am searching for the bones of your father, but I cannot seem to distinguish them from the slaves.”⁷⁷

Alexander got the message: all are equal in death. “All flesh is as grass.” All the glory of man is as the flower of the grass—even though he conquer the world.

But flesh does perish, and that is a cause for despair for those whose hope is in the flesh. But the hope of the Christian is in the Spirit and in the Word of God that abides forever. Paul wrote that the Lord rose, never to die again.

Romans 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Peter said that God,

I Peter 1:3 ... has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Guardian reported in 2017 that the Svalbard ‘doomsday’ seed vault that had been designed and built as an impregnable deep-freeze to protect the world’s

⁷⁷ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 1990, p, 90.

most precious seeds from any global disaster and to ensure humanity's food supply forever had been breached. The Global Seed Vault, buried in a mountain deep inside the Arctic circle, was breached after global warming produced extraordinary temperatures over the winter, sending meltwater gushing into the entrance tunnel.⁸

No seeds were lost but the ability of the rock vault to provide failsafe protection against all disasters is now threatened by climate change the publication said.

What man designs and builds to be impregnable— isn't.

On the other hand the rebirth through the word of God—is. And that word does not perish. Peter also wrote,

1 Peter 1:23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

And remember the admonition from Paul's letter to Corinth,

1 Corinthians 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the

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<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/19/arctic-stronghold-of-worlds-seeds-flooded-after-permafrost-melts>. Damian Carrington Environment editor; @dpcarrington; Fri 19 May 2017 11.39 EDT.

imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.