

How To Die Safely

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Seven men were working near a pipe carrying highly-pressurized water in a coal-burning power plant when, without warning, the pipe ruptured. The super-heated water inside the pipe turned to scalding steam, killing one man instantly and burning several others severely. One of the burn victims died two days later.

The hazards related to high-pressure steam in these power plants are frightening. Even a tiny hole in a high-pressure pipe can release a knife-like spray that is nearly invisible and so powerful that anyone walking through it would be severely lacerated and burned. For this and other reasons, power plants are dangerous places to work.



As one would imagine, the workers in a power plant environment are taught to be intensely safety conscious. Hard hats and safety goggles are always required, along with protective shoes, heavy gloves, and fall-protection harnesses when necessary. Still, despite safety precautions, accidents happen, in power plants as well as in other work places. According to the International Labor Office, 1.7 million people were killed worldwide in workplace accidents in 2005. Another 268 million were injured in non-fatal work related accidents.

Then there are traffic accidents. Automotive science has given us airbags, seatbelts, and anti-lock brakes, but they are not always enough. It is estimated that 1.2 million people are killed annually in traffic accidents, and another 48 million are injured. Add to this the numbers killed in airplane crashes, boating accidents, and recreational mishaps, as well as the multitudes who die from cancer, heart disease, and other physical ailments, despite health education and medical technology.



The fact is, life is dangerous. Appropriate safety precautions are *always* necessary. Even in the “safety” of our homes we install smoke-detectors, electrical circuit breakers in bathrooms and kitchens, and safety latches on cabinets to keep children away from medicines and chemicals. If one is appropriately cautious, many accidents can be avoided. It is possible, in other words, to live safely. The woman who wears her seatbelt is more likely to live to a ripe old age than the one who doesn’t. The man who avoids smoking is much less likely to die of lung cancer. But no one can live safely forever. The death rate among humans stands at a consistent 100%. *Everybody dies*. Furthermore, no matter how careful you are, the moment of your death is not ultimately yours to determine, but God’s.

The Bible actually speaks of two deaths. These will be distinguished from each other on the final day of judgment (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The first death is physical death, which everyone will face and which no safety precautions can delay indefinitely. But after the first death, on a day fixed by God, all the dead, including you and me, will be raised to face the Judge of the universe. On that day, many will be thrown into “the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8; cf. 20:15). Jesus described the destiny of these people elsewhere, saying, “These will go away into eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46). The second death is not as much a termination of life as it is the beginning of an eternal, hopeless, and infinitely miserable existence under the wrath of a just and holy God.

Given this reality, our greatest concern should not be how to *live* safely, but how to *die* safely. Every sensible person should shudder when thinking about hell and God’s judgment of unrepentant sinners in the lake of fire. And since we must all experience the first death in one way or the other, it is imperative that we learn how to avoid the second death.

The following passages from the Bible bring this matter into sharp focus. Please do not read them lightly. As careful as you may be during this life, your eternal safety is determined according to these truths:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
(John 3:16).

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36).

God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28)

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