

April 2023

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

Death of a Christian:

The Pain and Joy of Final Farewell
By Ruth Carter

How Should Christians View Death and the End of Life?

They said there was not much time left. I shifted in my seat by my mama's bedside. Her breaths were shallow and irregular. I was holding her hand, a hand that for 91 years had served all of us in so many loving ways. I could tell it was now losing warmth. Her nailbeds were getting dusky. Yes, there was not much time left. And then she turned and looked straight at me and was gone. I had pictured this moment many times over the last few weeks. How would I feel? What would I do? Would it be peaceful? I did not anticipate the overwhelming mystery. One moment my mama was here. The next moment her shriveled body was but a shell, and she was gone, never to return. Never, ever to return. It was a surreal, holy moment. I stood up, told the nurse, and drove home.

A Christian View of Death

Death is universal. Everyone is going to die. That's not news to anyone. But today we tend to live in stark denial of that reality. Years ago, my mother offered to have Thanksgiving dinner at their home because she said, "I don't know how long I will still be able to do it!" My immediate response was, "Oh, Mom. You'll always be able to have Thanksgiving dinner!" Total denial. Completely unrealistic. Psalm 90:12 (NLT) says, "Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom." The wise person understands an end is coming and lives life with acceptance of that fact and eternity in view.

So, if we have a healthy anticipation of life coming to an end, why is death so painful? Death was created to be a punishment. Do you remember? Genesis 2:16-17 reads, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" Adam and Eve went on to disobey. They did eat the forbidden fruit and from that moment on, animals and people that were intended to live forever

were punished with death. Punishment is always painful in some respect or it does not accomplish its purpose of being a deterrent and a correction.

Death requires courage. Most people accept the fact they will eventually die. If they are blessed to have lived a long, productive life and are now in a slow decline of aging until the final event, it is not death itself that brings fear; it is the process. I Corinthians 15:55–57 says, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? . . . But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The final event ushers believers into the presence of Jesus! It’s all good! However, the process we often fear. Depending on how long that may be, the days of the process can be quite an amazing gift that should not be wasted or ignored. Courage is needed to maximize the time remaining.

My father died at age 90. When he turned 80, he gathered my five siblings and me together in our large living room. We all sat in a circle, and Father courageously brought up the subject of death. He spoke openly about “Mother and I not being around too much longer.” He encouraged us to pass on to the next generation the faith that was given to us, that knowing Jesus makes all the difference. He discussed the plans he and my mother had for passing along their financial resources. I listened with tears streaming down my cheeks. It wasn’t easy to have this meeting. The conversation was just too difficult, but in

retrospect, it was so important for those of us left behind.

Serving the Dying Christian

Death is a time for the family to rally together. I was the oldest daughter, one of six siblings. My home was down the street from our parents. Most of my brothers lived out of town. During the last year, when our parents’ health was so diminished, I was able to be present every day, helping them just get through. I appreciated two things. I was okay being the primary go-to sibling for care, but I was really thankful when all the brothers and their wives showed up to give me support. We were a small army. We were of one mind. We had one mission: getting our parents over the finish line. I needed them, if for no other reason than to appreciate my efforts on the front line. Secondly, my husband blessed me with the freedom to devote my time to my mom and dad. Steve ate dinner more than once by himself. He spent evenings alone when I was helping to get the parents settled for the night. Because he was content while I was gone during this brief season, I am able to say now, “I have no regrets!”

Facing the end of life goes better if a plan is in place. Most seniors wish to discuss what the final journey will look like, but many are reticent to talk about it with their loved ones. The conversation can be facilitated so well by a pastor or chaplain who “knows the ropes” and is not so emotionally involved. Is there a will? What are the wishes for the resting place of the bodily remains? What should be included in

FUNNIES

A wife and mom invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?"

"I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied.

"Just say what you hear Mommy say," the wife answered, smiling.

The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

A three-year-old boy went with his dad to see a litter of kittens. On returning home, he breathlessly informed his mother, "There were two boy kittens and two girl kittens." "How did you know?" his mother asked. "Daddy picked them up and looked underneath," he replied. "I think it's printed on the bottom."

A new monk arrives at the monastery. He is assigned to help the other monks in copying the old texts by hand. He notices, however, that they are copying from copies, and not from the original books.

So, the new monk goes to the head monk to ask him about this. He points out that if there was an error in the first copy, that error would be continued in all of the other copies. The head monk says, "We have been copying from the copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son."

So, he goes down into the cellar with one of the copies to check it against the

original. Hours later, nobody has seen him. So, one of the monks goes downstairs to look for him. He hears sobbing coming from the back of the cellar and finds the old monk leaning over one of the original books crying. He asks what's wrong.

"The word is 'celebrate'," says the old monk.

The keynote speaker was in such a hurry to get to the venue that when he arrived and sat down at the head table, he suddenly realized that had forgotten his dentures. Turning to the man next to him, he whispered, "I forgot my teeth!"

The man said, "No problem." With that he reached into his briefcase and pulled out a pair of dentures. "Try these," he said. The speaker tried them. "Too loose," he said.

The man dug around in his briefcase again. "Here, try these." The speaker tried them and responded. "Too tight."

The man didn't seem taken aback at all. He dug around in his briefcase again. "Here. I have this pair. Give them a try." The speaker smiled. "They fit perfectly." He ate his meal and gave his speech without any further troubles.

After the event concluded, the speaker went over to thank his benefactor and return the spare parts. "I want to thank you for coming to my rescue. Where is your office? I've been looking for a good dentist."

"Oh, I'm not a dentist," the man replied. "I'm the local funeral director."

A foreman is a man employed to talk to visitors so that the other employees have a chance to work.