

Running the final lap, Keswick Convention 2023

Session 4. Approaching the finishing line: dying well

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4: 13,14).

“One thing I have learned is that dying well is rarely a coincidence. Rather it results from choices made throughout life. After all, dying well is nothing more than living well right up till the end.” John Dunlop

From a Christian perspective, the death of human beings is not to be welcomed and hastened. Death is an enemy which we must fight against. But, by God's grace, death can also become a 'severe mercy', a strange kind of healing, even an adventure, a gateway to a new reality.

1. The opportunities that dying well can bring

Spiritual growth

Healing, building, celebrating and completing relationships

Finding forgiveness

Re-ordering priorities

Fulfilling dreams

Letting go

Being thankful

Leaving a legacy for the next generation

Focussing on the finishing line

2. The temptations and challenges that dying may bring

1. *The temptation of Doubt and the virtue of Faith*

2. *The temptation of Despair and the virtue of Hope*

3. *The temptation of Impatience and the virtue of Love*

4. *The temptation of Pride and the virtue of Humility*

5. *The temptation of Greed and the virtue of Letting go*

6. *The temptation of the Denial of Death and the virtue of Acceptance*

7. *The Temptation of Self-reliance and the virtue of Dependence*

3. Questions for discussion with medical and nursing professionals

What symptoms am I likely to suffer, and how can these be reduced?

Should I carry on receiving medical treatment for my condition in the hope that it might prolong my life, or would it be better to stop all active medical treatments?

Where would I like to die?

Should there be a Do Not Attempt Resuscitation order?

Who will support me physically, psychologically and spiritually at the end?

4. Questions for carers to ask the person at the end of life

1. *What is your understanding of your current situation?*

2. *As you look to the future what are you most worried about? What are your greatest concerns and worries?*

"Suffering is not a question which demands an answer, it's not a problem which demands a solution...It's a mystery which demands a presence." Anon

3. *As you look to the future what are your goals for this stage of your life? What are the trade-offs you are willing to make and those you are not willing to make? What would you long to happen before you die and how might we help you to achieve this?*

God's plan for this age is not to *abolish* human suffering, but to *redeem* it – to bring blessing and healing out of evil and pain.

5. Falling asleep

It is very striking that the New Testament rarely speaks of believers in Christ as "dying". Time and again the phrase which is used is that believers "fall asleep". In fact Christ experiences the full awfulness of death so that we don't need to. In the death and resurrection of Christ the sting, power and grip of death have been fatally weakened and life has triumphed over death. Christ has died, so we can fall asleep.

What is the difference between dying and falling asleep? The person who is sleeping is in a temporary state of unconsciousness but they are still alive. Throughout the period of sleep, however long the sleep lasts, the person is still there, intact and unharmed. But whilst the period of sleep continues, the person is inaccessible. It's not possible to have a meaningful relationship with a person whilst they are fast asleep! They are alive, safe, intact but unreachable.

And sleep is temporary. When a person is sleeping we know that they are going to awake before long, and when they awake, they will be the same person. The person is in no way damaged or harmed by the period of sleep. So when our loved one falls asleep in Christ, they are still in a sense alive - safe, unharmed but inaccessible. And they are going to wake up again....

Our heavenly Father allows us to practice what it is like to die faithfully, to die as a believer and follower of Christ, every single night of our lives. You know precisely what it feels like to die in Christ – it is falling asleep. Imagine that feeling of being tired, exhausted and drained after a long and gruelling day, and at long last your head touches that soft pillow. And all you have to do is to give way to sleep, because you

know you are safe, you are secure, you are protected. Falling asleep is not something strange, alien, or terrifying. It's an experience that our heavenly Father gives us in advance so that we need not be fearful.

Some resources

Dying Well, John Wyatt, IVP

Talking about Dying; help in facing death and dying, Philip Giddings, Martin Down, Elaine Sugden, Gareth Tuckwell, Wilberforce Publications

Right to die? euthanasia, assisted suicide and end of life care. John Wyatt, IVP

The Stature of Waiting, William Vanstone, Morehouse Publishing.

The Christian Art of Dying; Learning from Jesus, Allen Verhey, Eerdmans

Finishing Well to the Glory of God: Strategies from a Christian Physician, John Dunlop, Crossway

More resources at johnwyatt.com

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