



GRIEF AND DYING AT THIS EXTRAORDINARY TIME

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This is a difficult time for everyone, but if someone you love is dying or has died, it can be a cruel time.

For good reasons, people are not always going to be allowed into a hospital room to say goodbye. For some people who are able, they will need to wear protective equipment and follow strict guidelines of physical contact and hygiene practices. This is not the 'good death' that we all yearn for those we love. Genesis 25:7-11 describes the death of Abraham and how he was honoured by his family according to tradition, which is something for which we all hope but may not be possible in the current situation:

“ Abraham died at the ripe old age of 175. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in Machpelah Cave, in the field east of Mamre that had belonged to Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite. It was the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; both Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried there. After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac, who lived near “The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.”

Usually, when someone is dying and there is time, the family is gathered to say their final words and to be present as they leave this life. Often the minister is called to lead the family in some final rituals which may be marking the forehead with the sign of the cross in oil, sharing some prayers and readings, inviting everyone present to share the stories and memories of that person's life and what that person has meant to them. The minister may leave a holding cross with the person, a cross often formed from olive wood with no sharp edges which fits perfectly into the palm of the hand and which can bring comfort.

Remember that most people do not die entirely alone. The medical staff are full of compassion for those they nurse. They have always held the hands of the dying,

smiling and being a reassuring presence, but they are now speaking of smiling with their eyes and using comforting words. Do not underestimate the medical staff in these situations as each person will know they are loved and valued and will be treated with dignity. Having said that, there are people who die once everyone has left the room, gone for a coffee, or gone home for a quick shower. We cannot explain this but must accept it – sometimes we say it's the person trying to save the family from additional grief, but we don't know. All we can do is sit with the reality.

WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

IF YOUR LOVED ONE IS DYING

- if you are able to spend time with the person, do all the things you would normally – tell them how much you love them, that you're there, and give them permission to go – basically, you say and do what YOU feel is right for you regardless of the protective equipment and gloves. You are all still you regardless of anything else
- there are some prayers and readings from Scripture that might be helpful to read aloud
- if only you are allowed into the room, ask other family members for their messages and memories and, if you are able, share them
- call Rev Claire – she can say prayers over the phone so the person can hear and there may be chaplains in the hospital who are also able to lead prayer so ask the staff
- talk to friends and family on the phone or however you usually connect. Share with them your feelings. Involve them, as they also will be struggling.

IF THE PERSON HAS DIED

- the person who has died is the same person whatever the circumstances of death – a person created in God's image, loved by God and by us

- there is no rush to organise a big service. Phone Rev Claire and let her know what's happened. Your choice of funeral director will talk to you and about what you need. Funerals are being held in the chapels of funeral directors or at gravesides and 10 people can attend whilst physically distancing, with recordings and streaming of services easily available. There can be no refreshments and everyone is encouraged to go straight home. Claire can lead a very simple funeral service at this time
- pick up the phone – we are here to support you so, even though this is unbelievably hard, you are not on your own
- you can still share memories and stories even though as a family you aren't together physically – there are many different techie ways to do this and the grandchildren will be able to help if you aren't sure. There are people within the church who can help too. And there's always the phone so call people and talk about the person you loved and have lost
- get out your photo albums – there's no rush to look through them for the funeral slide show so look at each one and remember the event, the time, what you were wearing, what you ate, where you went. Take your time to remember
- you will be upset. Grief is never easy. If talking to family, friends, or church people does not help you, then please contact your GP. It is natural to be upset
- light a candle – there are some prayers and readings from Scripture at the end which you might find helpful

When the time is right, we can work with you to plan a thanksgiving service in the church. There will be time to plan this properly and truly honour the person, relationships and memory. Delay can give this ritual real meaning so rather than focusing on what we sometimes call 'closure' around the time of the funeral, we will be able to focus on what that person gave us, shared with us, taught us – how we are better people for having known that person.

FINALLY

Let's not take each other for granted. Say what you've always wanted to say, settle differences, don't carry them in unknown futures. Now is not the time to be settling old scores and playing games, now is the time to let people know you love them and appreciate them. This is what scripture tells us over and over again but we never listen – let's take this time to listen.

READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

“ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

“ But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Luke 2:27-32

“ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

Romans 8:38-9

“ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 14:1-3

“ Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

Matthew 5:3-9

“ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 11:28-30

“ ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

Psalm 23

“ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Psalm 139:1-14, 17-8

“ O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night’,
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Philippians 4:4-9

“ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say,
Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8



For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Psalm 121



I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

PRAYERS OF FAREWELL AND COMMENDATION (FROM UNITING IN WORSHIP 2)

All shall be Amen and Alleluia.
We shall rest and we shall see.
We shall see and we shall know.
We shall know and we shall love.
We shall love and we shall praise.
Behold our end which is no end.
Amen
(*St Augustine*)

O God you are the source of all that is,
the beginning and the end of all existence.
You breathed into us the breath of life
and watched over us all our days.
Now, in the time of death, we return (name of loved one) to you,
trusting in your steadfast love,
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen

Loving God, giver of life,
all that we are and hold
have been on trust from you.
What you have given to us
we return to you.
When you bring us to judgment,
bless all that has been good,
put right and forgive all that is wrong.
Receive (name of loved one) into your eternal presence
where you are the light and joy of all your saints.

Make death the gateway to life,
and raise us to the fullness of salvation.
Give us grace to let go of those things
to which we must no longer cling;
and teach us in releasing one another
to know ourselves held by you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Heavenly God,
your son Jesus Christ commended his spirit
into your hands at his last hour.
Into those same hands
we now commend your servant (name of loved one),
that death may be for (name of loved one) the gate to life
and to eternal fellowship with you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Go forward (name of loved one) on your pilgrim journey,
in the name of God who created you;
in the name of Jesus who died and rose for you;
in the name of the Spirit who strengthens you.
May you have communion with all the saints in light;
may you rejoice with the whole company of heaven;
may your portion this day be peace,
and your dwelling place the heavenly Jerusalem.
Amen

God of love, God of peace,
into your hands we commend (name of loved one)
May (name of loved one) know the strength,
the courage and the comfort
that are the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
May (name of loved one) trust your sure love,
and rest secure in your everlasting arms,
now and forever.
Amen

Mighty God
we commend your child (name of loved one)
to your everlasting love and mercy.
Give (name of loved one) joy and gladness in your
presence,
the assurance of your forgiveness and love;
your peace, now and forever.
Amen

The Lord bless you and watch over you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious unto you.
The Lord look kindly upon you and give you peace.
Amen

God, who raised Jesus from the dead,
bring you to that eternal dwelling
where sorrow and tears are wiped away,
where death is swallowed up in life,
and where all hearts are made firm in love.
May the faithful rest in peace and rise in glory,
and God's blessing rest on all creation,
now and forever. Amen

PRAYERS FOR THE FAMILY

God of gentleness and strength,
comfort us with the great power of your love
as we mourn the sudden death of (name of loved one).
In our grief and confusion,
Help us to find peace
in the knowledge of your loving mercy to all your
children,
and give us light to guide us
into the assurance of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Lord Jesus,
We wait for you to grant us your comfort and peace.
We confess that we are slow to accept death
as an inevitable part of life.
We confess our reluctance to surrender
this friend and loved one into your eternal care.
You, Lord Jesus, know the depth of our sorrow;
you also wept at the grave of your friend Lazarus.
Let the Holy Spirit come upon us now,
the comforter you promise.
Grant us your love and peace
as we reach out to comfort one another.
Be our companion as we live through the days ahead;
and even as we mourn,
may all that we feel, think, say and do
bear witness to our faith.
Amen

Gracious God,
You made us and you love us.
Your love is our security and our hope.
We find our true selves, complete and whole,
only within your love.
And because in love you have prepared for us
a destiny more wonderful than we can imagine,
we trust you with our loved ones and ourselves;
in Jesus' name.
Amen

WORDS OF COMFORT

The following words and prayers are a selection which are often used in funerals and pastoral conversations, depending on the circumstances. You might find comfort at this time.

Eternal God,
Your love for us is everlasting.
You cry as we cry, you mourn as we mourn.
We have come face to face with death and our own mortality.

Part of our grief may be regret for things we said or didn't say to (name of loved one), for things done or left undone.
Part of our grief might be for things (name of loved one) did or didn't say, things done or left undone.
These moments have now passed.
This is the time for us to lay aside all those regrets and to honour the spirit and the person that (name of loved one) was.
(Name of loved one) would never want us to carry those words, actions and moments into our futures.
Let's accept this gift and go forward in peace.

Pause

Lord, come to us now with grace.
Speak to us that our faith may be strengthened,
embrace us that we may find courage for tomorrow,
hear us that we may find comfort for today.
Amen

To love someone is to risk the pain of parting.
But not to love is never to have lived.
The grief we now experience is the honouring of our love.
So let us go into the world glad that we have loved,
free to weep for those we have lost,
free to hold each other in our human frailty.
Let us go in peace.
Amen

God remembers you:
Your names and your stories
today and every day.
In the darkness before morning,
you will not be alone.
In the questions without answers,
you will not be unheard.
God is on your road.
God walks with you every step, every smile, every tear.
Today and every day,
God loves you and remembers you.
Amen
(untraced author – perhaps Iona)

It's time to go by Ruth Burgess

It's time to go.
It's ok to go.
We're here.
We love you.

It's been a fight for you.
We've watched you struggle,
watched your body dying,
seen you in sadness and pain.

It's hard.
This saying goodbye.
You love us.
We love you.
You don't want to go.

And we don't want you to go
but we know that you need to.
Your time here is over,
your job is done.

There's a time for fighting.
You've always been a fighter.
You're not going to change now.
We know that.
We know you.

But we need to tell you
that we're here
beside you,
and we're ok,
we'll miss you but we'll manage,
and we'll be here,
loving you
when you let go.