

**I**t was late morning in sun-filled hospital room 320. In it, an old man lay dying. From inside the room the occasional words of two people drifted into the corridor where I was in deep conversation with a mother agitated by a surgeon's report of a brain operation on her 16-year-old son. Suddenly, from room 320 came the quietly spoken words, "Now, he is with Jesus." A middle-aged woman and man emerged, their countenances as peaceful as their words had been, on their way to the nurse's station to report the death.

Not every death can or should be accepted so quietly. Consider these:

- The father standing over the mangled body of his five-year-old son, struck down by a car.
- The wife sitting in the emergency room with the body of her husband, dead of a heart attack.
- The parents of a teenage daughter whose life was snuffed out in a car accident.
- The middle-aged man told that his cancer is inoperable and too far advanced for treatment.

## Death Violates Human Life

Death was not built into God's creation; death violates human life. Further, God created us "to live in relationships" (Genesis 2:18, 20b–24).

The bonds of friendship, the singular union of woman and man in marriage, and parental love are cherished gifts of God. Death ruptures those relationships.

Can I prepare to meet death when it comes into my life? Yes and no. The last breath of a loved one followed by a silence that doesn't end declares with a painful finality that a relationship has been broken and cannot be restored this side of eternity.

These suggestions can help in dealing with the pain:

1. Let weeping become a song of praise (albeit in a minor key) for the gift the loved one has been.
2. Allow yourself to be vulnerable to your pain and even to your anger. Speak of your grief to a trusted friend as often as you need to.
3. Speak to your pastor as often as needed, especially if your loss has disturbed your relationship with God.
4. Continue your life of prayer and worship, even though your pain may worsen on those occasions.
5. Join a bereavement group, even if you think you are handling your emotions well. There is no healing in unexpressed grief.
6. Give yourself time. Healthy adjustment to the death of a loved one can take a very long time.

## Christ Can Sustain You

One can say that the man in room 320 had lived a life full of years, a fact that ordinarily tempers grief. But in their words "Now he is with Jesus," this couple found their strength elsewhere. The more freely you live your life in Christ, the more His presence will sustain you in a time of dying. Here are some life-shaping truths available to you in the Gospel:

**+** The risen Christ is present at every Christian's death. The Christian has a God who has passed from death to life. He speaks comfort, hope, and promise from beyond the grave.

**+** Your loved one is planted in heaven. "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42–44).

**+** In Baptism, God bestowed the blessing of Christ's life and death for the sins of the world on your loved one: new life in Christ and citizenship in His heaven. God has been faithful to His promise. In the moment of death God bestowed full citizenship of heaven on your loved one.

✝ Even if you feel that your loved one died prematurely, she or he has completed God's appointed tasks. A pastor's daughter delivered an infant that died within 45 minutes of birth. During that lifetime of less than an hour, the woman's father baptized the baby. The following day the grieving mother said to the hospital chaplain, "I can't make any sense of this. Why would God give me a normal pregnancy and then take my baby in her first hour of life?" The chaplain replied, "I can't see any farther or deeper than you. But I do believe that God can give you strength and can also bring some good out of the death of your baby." Several years later this woman chanced to meet the chaplain in a department store. She said, "Do you remember what you said? Well, I saw some good! After the woman in the bed next to me heard our conversation and those with my family, she decided to have her baby baptized. Before that she hadn't given Baptism a thought."

✝ Death is a break from a loved one so complete that you may feel that you are separated even from God. But God won't let that happen. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" God answers: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure 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" (Romans 8:37-39).

✝ Tears at the deathbed or later are the wordless language of a broken heart. How needed—but also how rare is a comforter who can bring a healing presence to your sorrow. There is one: the Good Shepherd who walked through the valley of the shadow of death. He says of those who have died in the Lord, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. . . . For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:14, 17).

With God, your Comforter and Healer at your side, your broken heart will heal, and you will rise from the ashes of death a stronger and wiser Christian.



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# Dealing with Death

