



# The Christian Art of Dying

LifeCare Memos® - Messages of Compassion

As a lady lay on her bed near death she asked me how she could get ready for the last hours and minutes of consciousness. Knowing that she was a Christian, I suggested that she might find comfort to pray as Jesus did on the cross:

*“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”* (Luke 23:46).

The Holy Scripture tells us that in the Lord’s agony He cried out with a loud voice and then breathed His last.

This dear lady was obviously struggling with the process of dying. We prayed that day and as the thought of following her Lord to the very end crept over her soul she thanked me. She died peacefully a day or so later.

Another time, a man who realized that his death was approaching asked me what he could do. I read to him from Genesis how Jacob

*“Rallied his strength and sat up in bed”* (Genesis 48:2).

Jacob then asked his son, Joseph, to get his grandsons and

*“Bring them to me so I may bless them”* (Genesis 48:9).

The man thanked me for helping him see the legacy that he wanted to leave his family. It meant that he was willing to reconcile with one of his children from whom he had become estranged in the stress of his closing years.

## **A Lost Art?**

Death is a difficult subject to talk about, let alone to actually face experientially. And yet, face it we must. As the Bible says,

*“To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die...”* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

As with birth, so in most deaths there is a “season” for it. There is time to prepare, to anticipate and to wait – no longer for a first breath, but for the last one (the most visible physical sign). For the person who loves Jesus as Savior there are many spiritual resources upon which to draw at the close of earthly life. Yet, Christian dying seems to be almost a lost art.

Older Christians of bygone years spoke of the imparting of “dying grace.” They were reminding us of the ability of Almighty **GOD** to deal individually with each one of us as we come to the close of our lives. Each of us can come to **GOD**’s throne of grace to find the grace to help us in this time of “extreme” need (Hebrews 4:16).

Christian dying is one of the great witnesses to the all-sufficiency of our Christian faith: a vital legacy that we can leave to our children, grandchildren, friends and healthcare workers (doctors, nurses, EMTs, hospital and Nursing Home personnel).

### ***Sufficient Courage***

We need a little more encouragement and understanding in the area of Christian dying. We should be like the Psalmist who said,

*“I will praise Him as long as I live”* (Psalm 104:33).

If at all possible, the writer wanted to include praise to his last breath. To understand what it really means to live as a Christian is a paradox. We are taught to lose our life to find it; to die to ourselves in order to live; and to take up our crosses (an instrument of death) to follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24). We are told to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1). At the close of life we “literally” get to lose our life to find it in Christ.

As the song reminds us, “What a friend we have in Jesus.” Listen to the Apostle Paul’s desire:

*“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage, as always, that now also Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:20-21).

A Christian can embrace the time for departure when it comes; fighting the good fight, finishing the course, keeping the faith, knowing that a reward awaits them (II Timothy 4:7).

It is interesting that children who are dying often lead the way for others through their simple faith. Our challenge as older adults should be in setting the example and demonstrating **GOD**’s saving grace and mercy in the dying hours.

## ***The Finishing Touches***

Those taken suddenly in death comprise only a small minority of people. So, let's decide to follow Jesus to the very end. Let's allow the Potter to continue to work over His clay in the closing days and hours of life. Even in this act, **GOD** can create a masterpiece for our families and the entire world to see.

It is not easy to get older. It is not easy to face the ravages of time. Remember, Jesus said to Peter,

*“I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”*  
*Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God”*  
(John 21:18-19).

There is a kind of death that you and I can experience that will “glorify **GOD**” in a unique way. When Jesus headed for the cross it was His desire to glorify **GOD**. Are you willing to set your face in the direction of glorifying **GOD**? Do you believe that if you do, **GOD** will supply all the grace you need in the season of your dying? You can trust **GOD** who says,

*“I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever”*  
(Revelation 1:18).

His promises are true, and He has gone before to prepare a place for you. As you enter this time of home-going, it is also a time to remember and to share that our Lord and Savior has not forgotten you, but instead awaits your coming with joy.

*“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2).

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### ***LifeCare Memos***<sup>®</sup>

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”* (Psalm 142:4-5).

***LifeCare Memos*** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.