

How to Die Gracefully

by Bryan Gibson

Your doctor has just delivered the grim news. You've got six months to live. How do you deal with news like that? How are you supposed to feel? Well, it's time you learn how to die—not just how to die, but to how to die gracefully. And you can, provided you're prepared to meet the Lord.

Dying gracefully begins with having the right attitude toward your impending death.

Understand, first, that you're not **really** dying. Your body is dying; it will go to the grave, but your spirit will return to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Here's the promise of Jesus: "If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51). "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Take the time to thank Jesus, because He "has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

Understand, too, as strange as it sounds, the day of your death will be **better** than the day of your birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1). That doesn't seem right, especially when you contrast the mood of the delivery room with the mood of the funeral home. But think about it. If you're a faithful Christian who is prepared to meet the Lord, the day you die is the beginning of what you've looked forward to your entire life.

This is probably not the way you would describe it, but in the eyes of the Lord, your death is a precious thing—"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Psalms 116:15). It is precious to Him, for one, because of all that He has invested in you, including the death of His Son. This was all done to prepare you for this very day. Your death is precious to Him, because He is about to give you what He planned for you from eternity.

Your death will be a "loss" for those you leave behind, but not for you. For you, it is the greatest "gain" you can possibly experience. What awaits you is "far better" than anything you'll ever experience in this life (Philippians 1:21-23). It's not a loss; it's a victory, a victory over sin and the grave, made possible through your Savior, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

Is it okay to cry? Sure it is; just don't cry like those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). They are about to spend eternity with the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41); you on the other hand are about to spend eternity with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). You will have some sad moments as you approach death; after all you're about to leave the people who are the dearest on earth to you. But surely in the midst of all this sorrow, you can find time to rejoice (2 Corinthians 6:10). You sure do have a lot to look forward to.

Keep trusting in the Lord until the last hour, because He will be with you and uphold you through this whole ordeal. The fact that you're suffering now does not mean that you've been separated from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-37). God has been carrying you from

the day of your birth; He's not about to drop you now (Isaiah 46:3-4). After all, His arms are "everlasting" (Deuteronomy 33:27). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalms 23:4).

It's certainly okay to ask the Lord for more time; just be prepared if that is not His will. Hezekiah asked for more time, and was given 15 more years (2 Kings 20:1-6). Epaphroditus "was sick almost unto death, but God had mercy on him" (Philippians 2:27). Perhaps God will have mercy on you and grant you more time, but then again He may not. You'll just have to pray the same way Jesus did—"let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

Learn to be content in this "state." Paul's statement, "I have learned in whatever state I am to be content" (Philippians 4:11), certainly applies to your impending death. Contentment won't come easy; you'll have to fight the urge to complain, or to become despondent, but remember what else Paul wrote in this same passage: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Take advantage of this opportunity to show the Lord's strength and power. When Paul pleaded with the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Your body will become weaker and weaker in your final days, but keeping praying for strength, and when it is granted, the source of it will be obvious to everyone. Your task is to magnify the Lord, not only in life, but also in death (Philippians 1:19-20).

Make things right with anyone you may have wronged (Matthew 5:23-24), and forgive anyone you may have failed to forgive (Matthew 6:14-15). If you're at odds with your brethren, then you're going to be in trouble with the Lord, and that's the very thing you want to avoid at this late hour. Make things right, because the day is fast approaching when that opportunity will run out.

Spend your last days encouraging others to be faithful, to continue in the work of the Lord. That's exactly what Paul did in his second letter to Timothy, when he knew that the time of his departure was "at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6). He warned Timothy about temptations; he urged him to continue in the things he had learned; he exhorted him to preach the word. You're bound to have a captive audience during your last days, so take full advantage of it.