

# How to Prepare for Death

“Therefore  
be on  
the alert,  
for you  
do not  
know  
which  
day  
your Lord  
is coming”  
(Matthew  
24:42).

We are all dying. We may die within a month, or we may live another fifty years; but every one of us will die (Hebrews 9:27).<sup>1</sup> The mortality rate for the human race is 100 percent!

Therefore, thinking about the loss of a loved one should also prompt us to think about preparing for death ourselves. Not only will this perspective help us to assist those who are dying, but it will also help us to be ready as we consider the inevitable end of earthly life. Since death is unavoidable, what can we do, or encourage others to do, to prepare for its coming?

## MATERIAL PREPARATIONS

From a practical standpoint, in view of the fact that everyone must die, responsible adults may want to attend to several matters. (1) A person may write a “last will and testament” to specify who will receive his possessions after his death.<sup>2</sup> (2) One may also prepare a “living will” to indicate his preferences regarding what measures should or should not be taken to keep him alive. (3) A couple with dependent children should indicate in their will how they want those children to be cared for if they should both die. (4) It is good for a person—along with his or her spouse—to make arrangements in advance for burial. (5) An individual can also make known his preferences regarding a funeral or memorial service.

While the dying often think about preparing materially, or financially, for death, such planning should begin as early in life as possible. Every provider should try to make arrangements for his family to be cared for in the event of his disability or death.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The exception to this rule is that those who are alive when Christ returns will not die; rather, they will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51).

<sup>2</sup>Many Christians find it satisfying to include a charity—such as the church, a Christian college, a children’s home, or a mission work—in their wills. This brings the satisfaction of knowing that the money they have given to the cause will continue to do good after they have died.

<sup>3</sup>Life insurance or monetary savings may be part of one’s plan to continue caring for his family after his death. Another possibility is to make sure that both partners in a marriage have acquired enough education or skill to enable each to make a living if the other dies. Of course, one of the best ways to help our families is to do whatever we can to prolong life—to take care of ourselves by eating correctly, exercising, and seeing a doctor when necessary.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATIONS

In addition to making the material arrangements associated with death, a terminally ill person must prepare psychologically and emotionally for the end of life. Human beings instinctively fight to continue living. The will to survive is so strong that many who have been given up for dead refuse to die!

Nevertheless, when the end eventually comes, each of us must accept the fact that we, too, will go the way of all flesh. It may be of some value to recognize that the dying, like the grieving, go through stages.<sup>4</sup> Becoming familiar with the stages of dying can be helpful—both as we fight to live and as we prepare to die.<sup>5</sup>

## SOCIAL PREPARATIONS

One who knows that he is dying should make sure that, as far as possible, he has taken care of any unfinished business relating to other people—to society and to his family. He may desire to say “goodbye” to friends and family members. An individual who has been estranged from others ought to attempt reconciliation with them, whether he is feeling guilty for something he has done or is holding a grudge against another.<sup>6</sup> To forgive and to be forgiven (Colossians 3:13) enables a person to approach the end of life at peace with himself and offers comfort to those who will be left behind.

## SPIRITUAL PREPARATIONS

The most important need an individual has as he faces death is to prepare spiritually. The Bible teaches that every person, after death, must face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). At the judgment, his eternal destination will be determined by how he has lived (Matthew 25:31–46; 2 Corinthians 5:10) and, in particular, by whether or not he has been saved by Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:14). Each one judged will receive either eternal life or eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). For one who is dying, the time for prepa-

ration is nearly past. He must make sure that he is ready to face judgment by responding obediently to the Lord’s offer of salvation.

If you are caring for one who expects to die soon, you may be able to help him “prepare to meet . . . God” (Amos 4:12). In doing so, you will need to be careful and tactful. No one can tell you how to approach another whose death is imminent, but the effort must be made. One who is dying may be especially receptive to the truth. If you can help him to become a Christian, you will give him the great gift of hope. As he faces death, he can do so with Paul’s attitude: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). He can know that he has, like Paul, “the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award . . . on that day . . . to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8; see also Revelation 2:10).

If you yourself are facing death (as, in fact, we all are eventually), then you should consider what you need to do to prepare for your inevitable trip to the grave. If you are inclined to say, “I am not about to die; I will live many more years,” you should remember the man whom God called a “fool” (Luke 12:20). The man said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19). However, God said, “This very night your soul is required of you” (Luke 12:20). Can you guarantee that tonight your soul will not be required of you? Death is inevitable, and it can come suddenly and unexpectedly. Therefore, you ought to prepare spiritually for death now. The Bible teaches that we should always be ready for the second coming of Christ, which could occur at any moment (see, for example, Matthew 25:13). For the same reason, we need always to be prepared for death.

How can you be prepared spiritually for death? Become a Christian by believing in Christ as the Son of God (John 3:16), repenting of your sins (Acts 17:30), confessing your faith in Christ (Romans 10:9, 10), and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Christians who have been unfaithful to the Lord need to return to their first love by repenting of their sins (Acts 8:22), confessing their sins (1 John 1:9), and seeking God’s forgiveness in prayer (Acts 8:22; James 5:16).

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<sup>4</sup>See the article “Facing Imminent Death.”

<sup>5</sup>To advise people to “fight to live” and “prepare to die” at the same time is only apparently contradictory. It is comparable to this common advice: “Hope for the best, expect the worst, and be prepared for anything.”

<sup>6</sup>From a biblical standpoint, whether one believes he has sinned against another or another has sinned against him, he should go to that person and try to make amends. (See Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15–17; James 5:16.)

## CONCLUSION

No one should go on a trip without preparation. We are all on a journey through life which will end in death, unless Christ returns first. Thinking about our eternal destination should motivate us all to make careful preparation.

If you have a loved one with a terminal dis-

ease, you should encourage him or her to get ready for death. However, it is just as important for you to make sure you are prepared for your appointment with judgment. Of course, you should not wait until death is threatening before you begin to prepare. You should live in such a way that you will always be ready to leave this world.

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