



From Coping to Cure

By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.

LESSON 14: LIVING AND DYING

THOUGHT STARTER:

Are most of us too busy to hear God's whispers?
Does it take a clap of thunder to get our attention?

It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

Hebrews 9:27, NKJV

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

Matthew 16:26, NKJV

It was April 25, 1982. Eva and I were alone in her private hospital room as she battled cancer. She was lying in bed with her head propped up on pillows when I heard her weak little voice say, "Am I going to die?"

I was stunned and not prepared for her question. I have always been forthright with Eva, but I was greatly tempted to lie to her. After a long pause, I heard myself say, "Yes, you are going to die."

She said, "I'm scared."

I asked, "Why are you scared?"

She said, "Because I made a mess of my life."

How could she say such a thing? This lady who had traveled the world by my side, who was my stable companion, who kept encouraging me, who left a heritage to a host of women whom she helped to understand their role as wife and mother, and who was a faithful career mother?

I asked, "Why do you say this?"

Her answer was a complete surprise. "I could have been a better mother. I could have been more careful with the money. I could have been a better witness. I could have

been more affectionate toward you."

How should I respond? I was always proud of the way she handled her role as a mother. It's true, she could have been more careful with money, but what did it matter now? There are very few women who served the Lord as she did. As far as being more affectionate toward me, only she would know.

My first impulse was to reassure her that she was wrong. But then I remembered many instances when, after listening to someone unburden themselves to us, we were tempted to soft-pedal their story. The only way to really help them was not to offer human sympathy, but to help them call sin by its right name.

These thoughts ran through my mind. Eva was about to meet Jesus. She wasn't concerned about her plants or her wardrobe or her makeup. She was concerned about her soul.

PREPARED FOR THE JOURNEY

Finally I whispered, "You know what we would advise people who told us a story like that, don't you?"

She answered, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NKJV).

She went on to tell the Lord what she told me. I could hardly hear her voice. As she prayed, it dawned on me that everything she said was true of me. I could have been a better father, more careful with the money, a better witness, more affectionate toward Eva.

When Eva finished her prayer, I prayed my prayer. Two weary pilgrims in a hospital room, getting our hearts cleaned up by the living God. I look back on that incident as one of the most inspiring, refreshing, renewing moments in our forty-two years of marriage. It was a final tune-up before the supreme event of all: preparing to meet the Lord.

The next day I was alone with Eva in her room. She was alert and seemed supernaturally peaceful.

I asked, "Are you scared today?"

She said, "No, not at all."

I asked, "Why not?"

She said, with a broad smile, "I got the garbage cleaned out of my heart last night."

I asked, "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes," she said.

Some visitors dropped in. When they left, I asked her if she would like to talk to our daughter Beth because our son Dick and his wife Patti had called the day before. I dialed the number and Eva chatted with Beth.

About a half hour later, Eva dozed off. I noticed that she was breathing unusually heavy. Just then, Sue, our daughter who was helping me take care of Eva, walked in. Together we watched Eva take a final breath and she was gone. I heard Sue say "Praise the Lord." I agreed. What a wonderful experience. She was with the Lord whom we loved and served.

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. (Psalm 116:15, NKJV)

I cannot and could not look at her death as a tragedy. I suppose it all depends on your preparation, and we really believe that to meet Jesus was the ultimate, supreme event of life.

Recently, I talked to a couple who had not seen their son for four years because he was in another country, getting an education. Of course they missed him, but they would not for one moment deprive him of that privilege.

I look at Eva's death in the same way. What a privilege for her to go on ahead to meet Jesus. Of course we miss her, but we would not for one moment deprive her of that privilege.

There were piles of cards that arrived after Eva died. One stood out that came from Dr. Earl Radmacher, the president of Western Baptist Seminary:

The Ship

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength and I watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come down to mingle with each other. Then someone at my side says, "There, she's gone."

"Gone where?" Gone from my sight . . . that is all. She is as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her; and just at that moment when someone at my side says, "there she's gone," there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!"

And that is dying.¹

"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34, NKJV)

The key to anticipating the death of the people we know and love is *preparation*. When you love someone as much as you do the Lord and He calls that person to come to Him, you will be pleased with His decision. This is the ultimate, crowning event that all of us will experience if we meet the conditions. A warm welcome from the One who loves us is what we eagerly anticipate if our conscience is clear.

I later found a note among Eva's papers, dated January 10, 1982:

Through this experience I've had the joy and comfort of having my family and friends upholding me in prayer and supporting me in every way. This has given strength, relaxation, and a deep sense of comfort and peace—and to know God has been with me, near me, beside me—with the promise, "I will *never* leave thee nor forsake thee"—what perfect peace and comfort this has been! Jesus had to suffer that awful experience of separation from *His Father*—He suffered alone—I have never experienced this!

She died April 26, 1982.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Corinthians 15:55, KJV)

PREPARED FOR THIS WORLD

Watching events unfold in my life and noting my responses to them have helped me draw some personal conclusions about this world.

- 1. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, NKJV).**

This command was a puzzle to me for a long time. How can I tell how much I love God? Is loving God in conflict with loving my family? Then one day I received a very clear answer given by Jesus Himself:

**"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me."
(John 14:21, NKJV)**

If I love Him, I will study and *obey* His commandments as the single top priority of my life. Observing whether I am obeying Him is a quick check to see if I have a rebellious spirit. He said that to love God is the greatest commandment of them all.

2. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39, NKJV).

Jesus said that this is the second greatest commandment of them all and it is like the first. This commandment has two sides to it. Jesus said that I am to look after my own soul as a priority equal to loving God:

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul." (Matthew 16:26, NKJV)

The other side of the command is to love everyone and be as concerned about their souls as my own.

3. "The earth is the LORD's" (Psalm 24:1, NKJV).

This fact has been a source of great freedom to me. I don't own anything. I am a steward of someone else's property. It belongs to the One I am to love with all my heart, soul, and mind. If I do, then I will care for His property as if it were my own. The Bible tells me that all that is in the world will be burned up. If that is true, then I need to heed the advice of my friend, Jack Klemke: to hold the things in the world lightly. It will all become an ash pile. Only people will be left!

4. "It is appointed for man to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27, NKJV).

This ought to be welcome, exciting news. Recently my wife, Jo, and I went to visit her ninety-nine-year-old mother-in-law. Jo eagerly looked forward to this visit. The closer we got, the more excited she got. Finally, Jo saw her: the crowning moment of a long journey to Salem, Oregon. What a pleasure to greet someone whom you love! Who would want to withhold such a privilege from anyone?

After meeting the Lord comes the judgment. If I have kept His commandments (the test of our love) then I can anticipate this greeting:

"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34, NKJV)

Happy thought!

5. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15, NKJV).

A PRECIOUS SIGHT

The key to anticipating the death of the people I know and love is *preparation*. When I love someone as much as I love the Lord and He calls that person to come to Him, I will

be pleased with His decision, provided my conscience is clear toward that person. This is the crowning event for the people we love: a warm welcome from our Lord.

6. “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Peter 3:18, NKJV).

Preparation for meeting the God I care about is a happy task. As I prepare and wait, I remember these things:

- Grow in grace. The ultimate achievement in yielding to the grace of God is to become more gracious as I grow older.
- Grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The more I study His commandments and do them, the more my appreciation of the benefits of obedience grows.
- Glorify Him: now and forever with my thoughts, emotions, and behavior. My decision to please God in these ways must be renewed day by day.

Lesson: A prepared heart has no fear of death and what lies beyond.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Review the thought starter at the beginning of the chapter. What thoughts were started?
 - Review the lead Bible verse. What does it say to you? Did you observe yourself in relation to the verse? Did you observe others in relation to the verse? Did you find any additional verses?
 - What is your response to the lesson at the end of the chapter?
1. When company comes, we scramble around to straighten up the house. What do we need to do to prepare for Jesus' coming?
 2. What do you suppose will be involved in the judgment mentioned in Hebrews 9:27?
 3. How much time, effort, and money do you invest in preparing for your vocation? Doing your job? Holding up your end of the family? Interacting with people? Recreation? Preparing to die?
 4. An athlete who loves his sport keeps reviewing the rules. The one who loves God keeps reviewing the commandments. Discuss.

5. Discuss the two sides to Matthew 22:39.

¹ "The Ship," author unknown, *Poems That Live Forever*, Hazel Felleman, ed. (Doubleday, 1965).

Permission to Reproduce and Distribute

Publisher grants permission to reproduce and distribute this material without written approval, but only in its entirety and only for non-profit use. No part of this material may be altered or used out of context without publisher's written permission.

©2012 Biblical Counseling Insights

See www.BiblicalCounselingInsights.com for additional life discipleship resources. Download a free Bible or other spiritual growth resources at www.GodResources.org.