



# the Encourager<sup>®</sup>

*Hope for Those Who Hurt*

Vol. 9 • No. 2  
Summer • 2003

Face to Face  
with Mortality

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The Outreach of Hope is a non-profit organization supported by tax-deductible contributions and the sale of resources. We are a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability and participants in the Combined Federal Campaign #2035, through Christian Service Charities.

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When we face death, when we face the loss of loved ones, we desperately need a rock-solid hope. The thought that this life is all there is—that we live and then die—is dreadful. When you realize how fragile life is, you search hard for the truth. You have to know what is real. You need a hope beyond this life.

Jan Dravecky

Dear Friends,

Whether our suffering comes from physical affliction, a tragic event such as 911, or another crisis, we all need hope. So in light of all our nation has gone through during recent times and the personal suffering many of you face, we thought it would be important for the next few issues of *The Encourager* to refocus our attention on heaven, our true hope.

Why is heaven so important? It's simple. Heaven is our real home. When we lose sight of heaven, we lose sight of our hope.

When our dreams for life on earth don't seem to be working out as we would like, heaven becomes all the more real and precious to us. But most of us have to overcome a big obstacle before we can truly appreciate and hold onto the hope of heaven. That obstacle is our mortality, and I know personally how difficult it is to face.

Prior to my cancer diagnosis, I thought I was invincible. I was a professional baseball player, life was good, and facing my mortality hadn't crossed my mind. So when I first heard the word *cancer* spoken in relationship to me, I was slammed face to face with the reality that I wasn't so invincible after all. All of a sudden, fear crept in. I didn't want to face the reality of my death.

I know many of you had a similar experience when your doctor gave you the same kind of news I received. It's quite natural to think of our mortality when we learn that our body has been invaded by cancer. But just because it's natural doesn't mean it's easy.

We usually view our mortality as a negative thing, but I believe that—as difficult as it is—coming face to face with our mortality is absolutely necessary if we are to live life to the full. When we hear the word *cancer* or come face to face with a life-threatening illness, we have no choice but to deal with the reality of our own mortality. It's not morbid to think about death. Doing so probes our deepest feelings and beliefs. Facing our mortality begs the question of where we find our hope. So although this issue of *The Encourager* deals with a difficult subject, I encourage you to journey with us through it. Facing our mortality is a necessary step toward finding a hope that will not disappoint us even in the midst of life's most tumultuous storms.



Dave

## FACING OUR FEAR

by Dave Dravecky

Honestly facing the fear of our own mortality is one of the hardest things we humans have to do. There's no question that it is very difficult to think or talk about our mortality. Even when we know how important it is to face it, it is still very hard to go there.

One reason it is difficult is that we view death as a negative. I know I do. Even though I look forward to the positive side of death—of being face to face with Jesus for eternity—I'm still a bit intimidated by it. And certainly the pain and suffering that can accompany death and the grief of separation from loved ones are not things we eagerly embrace. But I think what really keeps us silent is our fear of venturing into the unknown.

It's almost as if we're afraid that if we talk about death, it's going to happen to us. So we just keep quiet about it. It is almost as if we're trying to trick God into forgetting about us. Even though God knows the number of days each of us will have on this earth, it's as if we think, *if I keep quiet, if I don't say anything, if I don't let the death word out into the atmosphere, maybe I'll stick around a bit longer!*

There is no way we can avoid the inevitable, however, so I think the best course is to honestly face what we cannot avoid. If you're struggling with this, I'd like you to take a bold step with me. I'm going to pull back the curtain and look at two big fears I have to deal with when I consider my mortality. I hope my thoughts will encourage you to do the same and find peace in facing the transition from this life to the next.

My fears, and I suspect your fears, have to do with our fear of the unknown—what we don't know and what we don't control.

Death is scary because we don't know what it will be like. We don't know how it's going to happen. We don't have to look very far to see that there are some traumatic, tragic, and painful ways to die. When I think about those things, I just want to have a massive heart attack in my sleep and—boom—go to heaven.

The promise of heaven gives me hope in relationship to that fear. It gives me strength to face whatever I may have to go through on the journey of life. That's why the apostle Paul is such a great inspiration to me. He lived life based on the certainty that he would someday be with Jesus in heaven, and he was so focused on that relationship that he could say with confidence, "To live is Christ and to die is gain!"

My desire is to have that kind of a relationship with Jesus. I'm not there yet, but I'm working on it. The hope of heaven gives me the strength to face whatever I have to face, but at the same time the uncertainty of that hope causes



me to fear. Death is still a big unknown for me. I've never experienced it, so I wonder what it is like. As much as I believe heaven exists, I still question it. Doubts creep in. I wonder if there really is a God. I wonder where I will go if there is no heaven.

When I have those doubts and fears about death and what comes after, I have to exercise my faith. I have to go back to what I know to be true. I know the Bible says that heaven is a real place God has prepared for those who love Him.

I know that Jesus, the Son of God, came to bring us eternal life. I know that those who have the Son of God have eternal life. So I turn my focus away from my emotions and feelings and focus on the tangible truth of God's Word. I grab onto the simple truth that after death I will spend eternity in the presence of God in heaven. That truth, above all else, enables me to face the fears of life, even the fears of my mortality.

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**DEATH IS THE DESTINY  
OF EVERY MAN;  
THE LIVING SHOULD  
TAKE THIS TO HEART.**

**ECCLESIASTES 7:2**

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## **CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO FACE DEATH- AND BEYOND**

*by Dave Davecky*

One person who had a perspective on life and mortality that I really admire is the apostle Paul. He was so confident in his relationship with Jesus that he actually considered it better to be absent from the body—dead—and present with Jesus our Lord.

In Philippians 1:21 he writes, "to live is Christ and to die is gain." That's amazing! Paul's commitment to his relationship with Jesus was so incredibly strong it didn't matter to him whether he lived or died! How can anyone say such a thing? To be honest with you, I wish I had the confidence to say that.

Because of Paul's faith, he could live his life knowing that God would give him the strength to endure whatever circumstances life threw at him. He could even say, "Rejoice in your suffering because suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us." Wow!

Paul knew comfort, he knew peace, he knew encouragement, he knew love, he knew hope. He even knew how to be face to face with his own mortality. How could he have such confidence? His confidence was possible because Paul knew Jesus.

## TORN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Beve knew her time on earth was limited. She also knew that God loved her and that heaven awaited her. Yet she was in turmoil. Here on earth she had the familiar comforts of a wonderful family, scores of faithful friends, a fulfilling career, and roots deeply imbedded in her community. Ahead, in heaven, she would have a life she knew only in terms of images that defied description and promises she had to trust by faith, and she could barely imagine what that life would be like. She could feel the earth beneath her feet, but she could envision heaven only in her heart. No wonder she felt torn and conflicted.

"Why do I fight this?" she asked a friend. "I know God loves me, heaven will be wonderful, and my battle will be over, but I don't want to go. Why is this so hard?"

In response, her friend read Ecclesiastes 3:11 with her: "He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

No wonder death feels foreign to us! By God's design, eternity beats in our hearts. We know instinctively that we aren't meant to die. Part of us will live forever and we know it. So Beve's struggle to deal with conflicting feelings related to her mortality wasn't an indication of a weak faith. Rather, it was a natural response of an eternal being to an event that seems so final. Part of her felt as if it would live forever while part of her felt as if her life was slipping away. No wonder she felt torn.

Beve believed the promises of God, especially the promises of heaven, with all of her heart. But during her last days, it was the Promise Maker, not the promises, that comforted her most. The more she experienced God here, the less she feared going with Him there. During her last days, she experienced how much God loved her. She discovered how real His presence was, how tenderly He comforted her. She couldn't imagine Heaven, but during her last days, the love of its Architect was enough to ease the conflict.

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In his book, *Heaven*, author Joseph Bayly describes the conflict many of us feel when we face the imminent reality of death. In an imaginary conversation with God, he writes: "I'm ashamed to admit it, but I'm a little scared" he confessed to God. "I really like this world: the Rocky Mountains, the beach at Cape May, the fields behind our house, the barn through mist on a gray wintry morning. How can I adjust to heaven when it's so different?"

God answered simply, "That world you like is but a womb... You may not perceive it in that way but you are bound within earth world as surely as a baby yet unborn is bound within the womb."

Trying to defend his fear, Joseph replied,

"Maybe the baby would be scared to be born, to leave the womb."

"Then death is deliverance to life beyond your imagining," God explained, "the death incident is merely a passage from earth life, from the womb that has contained you until now, into the marvelous newness of heaven life. You'll go through a dark tunnel, you may experience pain – just as you did when you were born a baby – but beyond the tunnel is heaven. I promise you, you'll enjoy heaven."

*"Heaven" excerpt used by permission of Cook Communications*

## AFRAID NO MORE

Ever since she was eight years old, Hannah was terrified of death. The images of an accident victim dying on the street in front of her house were indelibly etched in her memory. Then, years later, she experienced the losses of death firsthand. One by one, within three years, she lost her mother, sister-in-law, best friend, aunt, and surrogate grandmother.

No wonder death scared her! Hannah had witnessed the trauma of a brutal death and experienced the emotional side of separation and loss. She had looked more deeply into the face of death than most of us, and she recoiled. Even her strong faith in God and her security in knowing that she would spend eternity in heaven with Him didn't loosen fear's grip.

Yet Hannah was destined to have an even closer encounter with death—her own.

She couldn't feel anything, but Hannah clearly heard the nurse's panicked cry to the doctor, "Oh my gosh, her heart has stopped!" She could hear herself groaning, but she felt no pain whatsoever. She felt totally liberated, free, and overflowing with joy. As she felt God's hand drawing, wooing, lifting her up off the table, she was ecstatic. She remembers thinking, much to her surprise, *I'm dying and I'm not worried at all about my family.* She knew they would be in the compassionate care of the same God whose love she felt flooding and permeating every fiber of her being. When she tries to further describe what she felt and saw during those rapturous moments, words fail her. The experience was too sacred, too overwhelming, to confine to words.

In the ambulance en route to the hospital, Hannah remembers hearing the siren. She heard a paramedic threaten to intubate her if she didn't breathe, but she couldn't move. As soon as the paramedic gave her a shot to counteract the medication that had caused the adverse reaction, she began to breathe on her own. Her near death experience was over, but what she experienced during those brief moments on the other side vanquished her lifelong fear of death. "I understand the fear of death," Hannah says, "because I had that same fear. But God is so tender, so compassionate. Death is nothing to fear."

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**SO I REJOICE AND AM GLAD. EVEN  
MY BODY HAS HOPE, BECAUSE YOU  
WILL NOT LEAVE ME IN THE  
GRAVE. . BEING WITH YOU WILL FILL  
ME WITH JOY; AT YOUR RIGHT  
HAND I WILL FIND PLEASURE  
FOREVER.**

PSALM 16:9-11 (NCV)

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**It has been said that man can live  
about forty days without food,  
about three days without water,  
and about eight minutes without air—  
but only one second without hope.**

IF YOUR HOPE NEEDS TO BE REVIVED

IF YOU HAVE NO HOPE AT ALL

JOIN US ON A JOURNEY...

## A JOURNEY OF HOPE

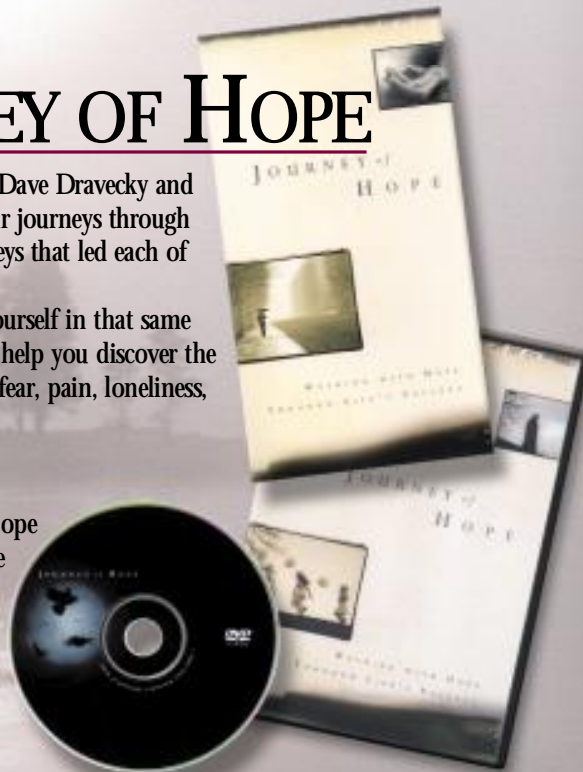
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# FOR THE JOURNEY

# Wisdom

I MAY NOT LONG FOR DEATH, BUT I SURELY LONG FOR HEAVEN.

JOSEPH BAYLY

WE PICTURE DEATH AS COMING TO DESTROY; LET US RATHER PICTURE CHRIST AS COMING TO SAVE. WE THINK OF DEATH AS ENDING; LET US RATHER THINK OF LIFE AS BEGINNING, AND THAT MORE ABUNDANTLY. WE THINK OF LOSING; LET US THINK OF GAINING. WE THINK OF PARTING; LET US THINK OF MEETING. WE THINK OF GOING AWAY; LET US THINK OF ARRIVING. AND AS THE VOICE OF DEATH WHISPERS, "YOU MUST GO FROM EARTH;" LET US HEAR THE

VOICE OF CHRIST SAYING,  
"YOU ARE BUT COMING TO ME!"

NORMAN MACLEOD

NO MAN SHOULD BE AFRAID TO DIE,  
WHO HATH UNDERSTOOD WHAT IT IS TO LIVE.

THOMAS FULLER

FOR THE PERSON WHO SUFFERS AND FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE SUFFERER,  
AN UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE AFTER DEATH BRINGS GREAT COMFORT. DEATH IS NOT JUST  
THE END OF THE PAIN, BUT IS ALSO THE RELEASE INTO A NEW LIFE FREE OF PAIN.

R. C. SPROUL

[JESUS]...SHARED IN THEIR HUMANITY SO THAT BY HIS DEATH HE MIGHT DESTROY HIM  
WHO HOLDS THE POWER OF DEATH—THAT IS, THE DEVIL—AND FREE THOSE  
WHO ALL THEIR LIVES WERE HELD IN SLAVERY BY THEIR FEAR OF DEATH.

HEBREWS 2:14-15

EVER SINCE I WAS A YOUNG CHILD, I HAVE BELIEVED IN JESUS' PROMISE OF EVERLASTING LIFE,  
BUT THE TRANSITION CALLED DEATH WAS ALWAYS A LITTLE SCARY TO ME.  
WATCHING MY SON JAMIE DIE WITH SUCH GRACE AND COMPLETE TRUST REMOVED MY FEARS.  
WHILE I AM EAGER TO LIVE, I AM ALSO EAGER TO TAKE THE JOURNEY  
WHEN GOD CALLS ME HOME.

TINA D'ALESSANDRO

THOSE WHO SQUARELY FACE THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR DEATHS ENJOY A RICHER AND MORE  
MEANINGFUL LIFE. THOSE WHO SUMMON THE COURAGE TO CONTEMPLATE THEIR MORTALITY  
TEND TO BE MORE FOCUSED ON THE IMPORTANT THINGS OF LIFE, LESS APT TO BE DRIVEN  
TO PURSUITS THAT THEY WILL REGRET IN THE LONG RUN.

WILLIAM A. FINTEL, GERALD R. McDERMOTT

EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH,  
I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME.

PSALM 23:4

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## MOVING FROM TENT TO HOME

No matter how much we treasure it, our earthly body is a very temporary thing. As a reminder of this truth, the Bible uses the image of a tent to describe our body. It's not a particularly flattering image. Tents leave a lot to be desired. They leak. They tear. They wear out. Eventually they are cast aside.

The whole image could be discouraging to us, but that's not how the Bible intends it. The apostle Paul actually found hope in the idea that his body was merely a tent. In 2 Corinthians 5:1 he writes, "We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

What a promise! In the midst of fear, doubt, and worry that so often accompany the failure of our earthly tent, we can find comfort and rest in God's promise of an eternal, heavenly dwelling. In the following poem, Roselyn Aronson describes the pain and the promise of being tent dwellers. We hope it will be an encouragement to you.

### O MR. TENTMAKER

---

IT WAS NICE LIVING IN THIS TENT WHEN IT WAS STRONG AND SECURE  
AND THE SUN WAS SHINING AND THE AIR WAS WARM.  
BUT MR. TENTMAKER, IT'S SCARY NOW.  
YOU SEE, MY TENT IS ACTING LIKE IT IS NOT GOING TO HOLD TOGETHER;  
THE POLES SEEM WEAK AND THEY SHIFT WITH THE WIND.  
A COUPLE OF STAKES HAVE WIGGLED LOOSE FROM THE SAND;  
AND WORST OF ALL, THE CANVAS HAS A RIP.  
IT NO LONGER PROTECTS ME FROM BEATING RAIN OR STINGING FLY.  
IT'S SCARY IN HERE, MR. TENTMAKER.

LAST WEEK I WENT TO THE REPAIR SHOP AND SOME REPAIRMAN  
TRIED TO PATCH THE RIP IN MY CANVAS.  
IT DIDN'T HELP MUCH, THOUGH, BECAUSE THE PATCH PULLED AWAY FROM  
THE EDGES AND NOW THE TEAR IS WORSE.  
WHAT TROUBLED ME MOST, MR. TENTMAKER, IS THAT THE REPAIRMAN DIDN'T  
EVEN SEEM TO NOTICE THAT I WAS STILL IN THE TENT;  
HE JUST WORKED ON THE CANVAS WHILE I SHIVERED INSIDE.  
I CRIED OUT ONCE, BUT NO ONE HEARD ME.  
I GUESS MY FIRST REAL QUESTION IS:  
WHY DID YOU GIVE ME SUCH A FLIMSY TENT?  
I CAN SEE BY LOOKING AROUND THE CAMPGROUND THAT SOME OF THE TENTS ARE MUCH  
STRONGER AND MORE STABLE THAN MINE.  
WHY, MR. TENTMAKER, DID YOU PICK A TENT OF SUCH POOR QUALITY FOR ME?

AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO ABOUT IT?  
O LITTLE TENT DWELLER, AS THE CREATOR AND PROVIDER OF TENTS,  
I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU AND YOUR TENT, AND I LOVE YOU BOTH.  
I MADE A TENT FOR MYSELF ONCE, AND LIVED IN IT ON YOUR CAMPGROUND.  
MY TENT WAS VULNERABLE, TOO, AND SOME VICIOUS ATTACKERS RIPPED IT TO PIECES WHILE I  
WAS STILL IN IT.  
IT WAS A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE, BUT YOU WILL BE GLAD TO KNOW THEY  
COULDN'T HURT ME;  
IN FACT, THE WHOLE OCCURRENCE WAS A TREMENDOUS ADVANTAGE  
BECAUSE IT IS THIS VERY VICTORY OVER MY ENEMY THAT FREES ME  
TO BE A PRESENT HELP TO YOU.

O LITTLE TENT DWELLER, I AM NOW PREPARED TO COME AND LIVE IN YOUR TENT WITH YOU, IF  
YOU'LL INVITE ME.  
YOU'LL LEARN AS WE DWELL TOGETHER THAT REAL SECURITY COMES FROM  
MY BEING IN YOUR TENT WITH YOU.  
WHEN THE STORMS COME, YOU CAN HUDDLE IN MY ARMS AND I'LL HOLD YOU.  
WHEN THE CANVAS RIPS, WE'LL GO TO THE REPAIR SHOP TOGETHER.

SOME DAY, LITTLE TENT DWELLER, SOME DAY YOUR TENT IS GOING TO COLLAPSE;  
YOU SEE, I'VE DESIGNED IT ONLY FOR TEMPORARY USE.  
BUT WHEN IT DOES, YOU AND I ARE GOING TO LEAVE TOGETHER.  
I PROMISE NOT TO LEAVE BEFORE YOU DO.  
AND THEN, FREE OF ALL THAT WOULD HINDER OR RESTRICT,  
WE WILL MOVE TO OUR PERMANENT HOME AND TOGETHER, FOREVER,  
WE WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD.

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**FOR WHILE WE ARE IN THIS TENT, WE GROAN AND ARE  
BURDENED, BECAUSE WE DO NOT WISH TO BE  
UNCLOTHED BUT TO BE CLOTHED WITH OUR HEAVENLY  
DWELLING, SO THAT WHAT IS MORTAL MAY BE  
SWALLOWED UP BY LIFE.  
NOW IT IS GOD WHO HAS MADE US FOR THIS VERY  
PURPOSE AND HAS GIVEN US THE SPIRIT  
AS A DEPOSIT, GUARANTEEING WHAT IS TO COME.**

2 CORINTHIANS 5:4-5

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Article adapted from *Do Not Lose Heart* by Dave and Jan Dravecky, published by Zondervan. To order, use the order envelope, order online, [www.OutreachOfHope.org](http://www.OutreachOfHope.org) or call, 800 295 5880.

## WHEN A FRIEND WRESTLES WITH MORTALITY

Many of us first come face to face with the reality of our mortality when a friend or loved one does. We of course want to support, comfort, and encourage, but our own feelings of sorrow, fear, and inadequacy can paralyze us into a state of inaction—or worse—withdrawal. The last thing our friend or loved one needs, and the last thing we want to do, is to fail when we are needed most.

While there is no clear roadmap to steer us through the difficult path of being a companion and friend to someone who is facing their mortality, there are some things we can do to help make the journey a little easier.

### WALK A MILE

Would-be encouragers can better understand the emotional responses and needs of someone who is facing their mortality by asking themselves, “How would I feel right now if I expected my life to end in the coming weeks or months?” Walking a mile in a friend or loved one’s shoes can help us graciously accept authentic expressions of emotion—even outbursts of anger, long silences, unexpected tears and seemingly senseless compulsions—that are often part of the struggle.

Facing our own mortality benefits us as well. Scripture instructs us to “number our days” (Psalm 90:12) and reminds us that because we will someday die, we “should think about it while there is still time” (Ecclesiastes 7:2, NLT). While this may seem like a morbid undertaking, it prompts us to live out our days wisely, viewing every day as a gift, treasuring every relationship, and considering the eternal consequences of every action.

### ACCEPT THE TRUTH

Sheila accompanied her friend and her friend’s family to what they knew would be a pivotal doctor’s appointment. When the doctor gave the grim results, Sheila’s friend experienced a panic attack and hyperventilated. All the while, family members kept reassuring her that everything would be okay, that planned trips and events would go on as scheduled, that life would go on as normal.

Sheila recalls her friend’s reaction. “She looked around the exam room like a cornered animal, trying to find someone whose eyes would look into hers and acknowledge the truth of what was just said, someone who would let her express her pain and fear, who would let her concede that she was losing her battle.”

During the days and weeks that followed, Sheila watched others purposely avoid the subject of her friend’s diagnosis, prognosis, or feelings—even when her friend tried to talk honestly about them. So Sheila made a point of letting her friend pour out her heart. She let her friend say whatever she needed or wanted to say, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable it was.

Although it is normal to feel completely inadequate and ill equipped to deal with what a person who is wrestling with his or her mortality shares, no topic—whether it be fears, frustrations, or funerals—should be off limits. It’s not your answers that are needed, it’s your heart and ears.



## GRANT FREEDOM GRACIOUSLY

Bob, a farmer for decades, was determined to bring in the hay. It didn't matter to him that he was on massive doses of pain medicine, that his doctor had stopped all treatment, or that family members thought he had more important things to do.

One family member insisted that he shouldn't operate farm equipment in his condition and worried that he wasn't wearing a hat. Bob's wife felt caught in the middle between her husband's desire to be productive and her family members' concern. So she called a friend to gain some perspective.

"Is he endangering anyone?" the friend asked. "Has he crashed into the barn? Is he getting the hay in?" Bob's wife confirmed that no one was at risk, that the barn was still standing, and that hay was being harvested.

"Then let him finish," the friend suggested. She knew that bringing in the hay was one of many tasks Bob wanted to complete to prepare his family for his absence, and it accomplished much more than filling the barn. A person who is wrestling with mortality needs to be able to choose where and how to invest his or her energy. It was therapeutic for Bob to do something he still felt competent to do. It was uplifting for him to experience the pleasures of this life, the warmth of the sun on his skin, and the smell of hay in the air. Knowing these things, the friend added, "And if he decides he needs to dance naked out in those fields, let him do that, too!"

## SHARE THE BURDEN

"What are you worried about?" Pam's friend asked, "What can I do? How can I pray for you?"

Pam answered her friend's questions immediately. First, she wanted her son, a young adult, to grow in his faith. She feared her early death would harden his heart toward God. Second, although she had told her husband that she wanted him to remarry, she knew he would struggle with feelings of guilt. She wanted someone to be there to remind him that she had given her blessing to his remarriage. She went on to list several more things that she was carrying in prayer; things left undone in her relationships, issues with which she knew her family would wrestle.

As soon as she verbalized her list to her friend, her countenance changed. She had passed the baton of her burdens onto a faithful friend whom she knew would carry them to the throne in prayer and as best she could, fulfill them here on earth.

*To protect their dignity and privacy, no real names were used in this article.*

### Providing Help, Preserving Dignity

Would-be encouragers walk a fine line between lessening a suffering friend or family member's burden and doing so much that the individual's self-esteem is undermined. While the specifics vary from person to person and situation to situation, following these rules of thumb will help:

- Don't assume that you know how your friend or family member would respond. Provide options and let the individual make the decision.
- When possible, involve your friend or family member in all conversations regarding his or her care. One patient yelled to nurses and family members who were standing at the foot of his bed discussing his needs and options: "Hey, I'm right here and I have an opinion!"
- A seasoned hospice nurse suggests: "Don't do anything for your friend or family member that he or she is capable of doing and should do."

## BUILDING BRIDGES, MENDING FENCES: *R<sub>X</sub> for the Journey*

When mortality slaps us in the face, we often look at life as we never have before. We may go through a period of lamenting past failures, time and resources ill-spent, and misplaced priorities. This is not only normal, it's healthy.

Such was the case for Roger, who at age sixty-two learned he had an inoperable tumor and would probably live no more than a few weeks. The shocking news caused him to look hard at his life, and he didn't like what he saw. He had experienced success as well as loss in business, but his personal losses—the end of his marriage and estrangement from his children—concerned him.

The process of facing his mortality brought Roger to a place of honesty, openness, and willingness to change. The Christian faith he had discovered shortly before his diagnosis came alive in a powerful way. He began living out the words of the psalmist, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I obey your word" (Psalm 119:67).

Roger pushed himself to seek out his children, two of whom lived hundreds of miles away. Old wounds were healed, and new love blossomed. The new Roger found delight in caring for people who were hurting. He prayed for them, he went out of his way to help meet their special needs, he was generous with hugs and acts of kindness. When Roger died eight months after his diagnosis, he died at peace with God, himself, and others.

Although it is not healthy to stay in a place of reflection and regret for too long, many people who face life-threatening illnesses are grateful for the opportunity to make corrections and positive changes in their lives. The past can't be changed, but how we respond to what we learn from it greatly affects the remainder of our lives and the lives of those we love.

That's why the advice of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:13 is so important. He admonishes us to forget "what is behind" and to strain "toward what is ahead," to press on toward perfection in our faith and how we live. Building bridges and mending fences may be just the prescription we need to face the next step in life.

Roger's story is adapted from *Dear God, It's Cancer*, William A. Fintel, M.D. and Gerald R. McDermott, Ph.D., Word Publishing, Nashville, TN.

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**TEACH ME TO  
LIVE THAT I MAY  
DREAD MY  
GRAVE AS LITTLE  
AS MY BED.**

THOMAS KEN

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# STRAIGHT TALK FROM DAVE

## **HOW HAS HAVING HAD CANCER AND FACING YOUR MORTALITY CHANGED HOW YOU LIVE?**

Prior to having cancer, I felt invincible. I really did. The truth of my own mortality never crossed my mind.

Part of the reason I was so blind is that I had always lived my life way out in front of where I was. I was always looking ahead to the next thing. As a kid I looked forward to being a teenager. Then I couldn't wait to be 16 so I could drive. Then I wanted to be 21 and officially an adult. After that, I kept living for the next step, the next stage in life: getting called up to the big leagues, landing a multi-year contract, having enough money to buy the house and car I wanted.

I naturally thought these things would happen because those were the goals I set and pursued. Life was going so fast. I remember guys in the dugout occasionally commenting that it would be wonderful to stop and smell the roses. I understood the concept, but the times I stopped were few and far between. I never stopped long enough to think that the future I wanted in life might not happen.

Cancer changed that perspective but not immediately and, even today, not perfectly. After I made my comeback, I was still looking forward to the next multi-year contract. It wasn't until I broke my arm while on the mound that reality truly began to set in. That's when I began to value each day.

Prior to that time, I could say that living for today is the way to live, but my life didn't reflect that. I was always looking ahead to what I wanted out of life next. When the reality of my mortality set in, when I realized I wasn't invincible, I began to want to make the most of each moment and each day—not the next week, month, year, or decade.

Learning to focus on the moment and make the most of it has enriched my life tremendously. It has enabled me to focus more on the people around me, particularly those close to me. I still miss the mark sometimes, but I have learned to take the pauses in life that get me back on track. Facing the uncertainty of life has finally helped me begin to stop and smell the roses.