

Preparing for Death

Some people say they are afraid of death. Others say they are not. But most people are quite afraid of dying. The slow deterioration of mind and body, the pains of a growing cancer, the ravaging effects of AIDS, becoming a burden for your friends, losing control of your movements, being talked about or spoken to with half-truths, forgetting recent events and the names of visitors—all of that and much more is what we really fear. It's not surprising that we sometimes say: "I hope it doesn't last long. I hope I will die through a sudden heart attack and not after a long, painful illness."

But, whatever we think or hope, the way we will die is unpredictable and our worries about it quite fruitless. Still we need to be prepared. Preparing ourselves for our deaths is the most important task of life, at least when we believe that death is not the total dissolution of our identity but the way to its fullest revelation. Death, as Jesus speaks about it, is that moment in which total defeat and total victory are one. The cross on which Jesus died is the sign of this oneness of defeat and victory. Jesus speaks about his death as being "lifted up."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henri J. Nouwen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!

JOHN 12:27,28a (NIV)

How can I be spiritually prepared to die?

Spiritual preparation for death is a personal journey that can take many different forms. There is no one right way to do it, and what works for one person may not work for another. However, there are some general things that you can do to help you prepare for the end of your life.

- **Make peace with your loved ones.** Talk to the people you care about and let them know how much you love them. Forgive any grudges you may be holding onto.
- **Spend time in nature.** Nature can be a powerful source of comfort and peace. Take some time to go for walks in the woods, sit by the ocean, or just look at the stars.
- **Do something creative.** Express yourself through art, music, or writing. This can help you to process your thoughts and feelings about death.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment without judgment. This can help you to live more fully in the here and now and to accept death as a natural part of life.
- **Read books or articles about death and dying.** This can help you to learn more about the process of death and to prepare yourself for what to expect.
- **Talk to a therapist or counselor.** If you are struggling to cope with the thought of death, talking to a therapist or counselor can be helpful. They can provide you with support and guidance as you navigate this difficult time.

Ultimately, the best way to prepare for death is to find what gives your life meaning and to live each day to the fullest. When you are at peace with your life, you will be more likely to be at peace with death.

The Episcopal Church offers spiritual care to those who are dying and their loved ones. This care is based on the belief that all people are created in the image of God and that death is not the end of our existence. The church provides a variety of resources to help people cope with the dying process, including:

- **Rituals and prayers:** The church offers a variety of rituals and prayers that can be used to comfort and support those who are dying and their loved ones. These rituals can help people to express their grief and to find hope in the midst of loss.
- **The sacraments:** The church's sacraments, such as Holy Communion and the Anointing of the Sick, can provide comfort and strength to those who are dying. These sacraments remind people of God's love and presence in their lives.
- **Support groups:** The church offers support groups for people who are grieving the loss of a loved one. These groups can provide a safe place for people to share their feelings and to receive support from others.
- **Individual counseling:** The church also offers individual counseling to people who are dying and their loved ones. This counseling can help people to deal with the emotional and spiritual challenges of the dying process.

In addition to these resources, the Episcopal Church also encourages its members to provide spiritual care to those who are dying in their own homes and communities. This care can take many forms, such as:

- **Visiting:** Simply visiting someone who is dying can be a powerful act of love and support. It can provide an opportunity to listen to the person's stories, to offer comfort and prayer, and to simply be present with them.
- **Reading scripture:** Reading scripture can be a source of comfort and strength for those who are dying. The church's many passages about death and resurrection can offer hope and assurance in the midst of loss.
- **Prayer:** Prayer can be a powerful way to connect with God and to find comfort and strength in the midst of difficult times. The church offers many prayers that can be used for those who are dying.

The Episcopal Church believes that spiritual care is an essential part of the dying process. By providing these resources and support, the church seeks to help people to find comfort, hope, and peace in the midst of loss.

5 Spiritual Practices to Prepare For the End of Life

Use your faith to handle your last days.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a powerful quality of healing and transformation that can assist you to release the deepest fears of your life. These fears come from feelings, ideas and attitudes that are projected on to others and objects. These projections are the externalizations of your guilt and blame toward others. These negative projections are a defense against your anxiety and fear. Forgiveness is the energy that releases these outwardly directed projections. These negative projected thoughts attach you to the constricted self of this world. At the end of life, you must let go of everything that you are connected to in this world. Forgiveness is a gift that helps release you from the negative attachments throughout your life as you move into your dying process.

Forgiveness Exercise

In this exercise make a list of the people and issues you identify that you have negative feelings toward and who may have negative feelings toward you. Focus on each person or issue in turn saying the following phrases below. As you say these phrases focus your attention on your heart. Practicing forgiveness will begin to open your heart and heal your mind.

- I forgive myself, or another person or the group for not understanding what happened.
- I forgive myself, or another person or the group for making mistakes.
- I forgive myself, or another person or the group for not following (my or their) deepest values.
- I forgive myself, for hurting (myself, another person or group).

Do the statements first for yourself and then turn it around and imagine the other person or the group forgive themselves for the painful situations. As you repeat these phrases on your issues over a period of time you will experience a lightness and deeper heart connection within you.

Gratitude

Gratitude is a powerful energy that can open your heart daily. Gratitude alters how you see the world and is available for a fuller, more conscious, and deliberate expression of yourself. With gratitude you easily begin to move into the expanded self. When you do not live daily in an attitude of gratitude you move back into the constricted self. Gratitude slows you down to see, feel and experience depth, clarity and understanding of any person, event, or expression. The practice of gratitude grounds you and opens within you a greater awareness that touches the infinite.

Gratitude Exercise

Make a list of people, events, situations, and experiences in your life that have supported, inspired, and motivated you over the last five years. Go over the list daily

giving thanks for the people and events. Touch your heart as you speak your thanks. Add to your list as you recall new things to be grateful for. This practice will become a natural part of your life.

Gratitude is the inner jewel that you finally experience as you enter into the dying process and leave this world. With gratitude you can then move into expanded dimensions and realms of existence as you go through the doorway of your death.

Appreciation

Appreciation changes and charges your energy field. You have more energy because you are connected directly to the Expanded Self. The more you learn to be aware from your inner world of appreciation the more you will see the good and the beautiful as well as the conscious qualities and the true essence of the person, situation, or event you encounter.

Appreciation opens the doorway to present moment awareness. Awareness is the deep quality of love of being aware at a larger context of perception. There is both awareness of the outer world as well as the inner world simultaneously. Awareness is the opening to the expanded world and its many dimensions. This expansion is the power of appreciation because you perceive the reality of love that directly eliminates judgment or preconception. In this state you are in the present moment awareness. When dying this is the state you want to learn to be in.

Appreciation Exercise

Everyday be on the look out for people and situations to express your appreciation. Also, look for ways to appreciate yourself. Here are the steps to follow:

- Simply be attentive to see who or what are in your range of awareness and note what they are doing and acknowledge what you see to yourself or others.
- For example, you see a cat stretched out on a windowsill and say to the cat, "You look beautiful in your relaxation".
- Also, you are in the office and observe someone working late simply speak your appreciation to them to honor their effort.
- Or you may hear a beautiful piece of music with a string solo. In your mind appreciate the talent of the person playing the music.
- As you observe the different elements in a person or situation demonstrate appreciation by speaking out loud; don't think about it or evaluate it. Just allow it to come out naturally.

To experience appreciation daily enables a deepening connection with all of life. As with any practice first appreciate what you are and what you do daily in your life; you will then find that it becomes easier to appreciate others.

Kindness

In our society kindness is an attitude of being considerate and temperate with yourself and others. Kindness is basically a means of acceptance that holds that whatever the person, circumstance, or condition you can respond without judgment or a stance of

superiority. Kindness, when you consciously practice it, generates energy, and creates a higher vibrational frequency within you. This higher frequency moves quickly toward the spectrum of light. In Kindness things lighten up emotionally and in your perceptions. The action of kindness comes through your insight. Your insight will show you what to do or not do in any situation. Kindness cannot be driven by the constricted self, but only as you open to the Expanded Self. It is in this Expanded Self of self-kindness in which you want to die.

Kindness Exercise

In practicing kindness, you gain insight naturally as you put your attention at the forehead and at the crown of your head. These are two strong energy centers.

- In meditation, whether walking or just sitting, quietly focus your attention on the forehead and the crown of your head simultaneously. Hold your attention on these two energy points until you feel warmth, buzzing, pulsation or whatever sensation brings you more awareness.
- Hold your attention on these dual points as much as you can as you move through your day observing what you experience.
- After a few days of attention and focus of these two centers bring your awareness down from the crown and forehead into your heart.
- Bringing the attention down to your heart opens your insight and awareness of the needs and concerns of others.
- In time, by doing this practice you will see into people and situations and know what the appropriate action needs to be.

This practice will bring caring and goodness to yourself and all beings and things with which you come into contact. This practice will open you naturally into the Expanded Self. With consistent practice you will live in and use kindness in any action in your life and be at peace as you die.

Compassion

Compassion is not a feeling or an emotion. Compassion is an act of becoming unified with the energetic field of another person. It is the experience of having the direct and same experience as the other because you are on the same energy frequency as the other person. When you break down the word compassion it is “com” meaning “with” and “passion” which is what drives one’s energy and motivation. In compassion you attune to the frequency of the other by focusing on your heart and their heart. When you say you have compassion for another what you “feel” is that you are “with” the core essence of their energy condition. In that common space you and they are unified. The ultimate act of compassion is for oneself. This is the compassion you need for yourself when you are dying.

Compassion Exercise

- The first step in the practice is to sit quietly, explore inwardly and acknowledge the energetic feelings of your own pain and suffering.
- Name what is your suffering and pain.

- Focus and hold these conditions in your heart. Put your attention on feeling a warming, pulsating, or any other sensation built at your heart center. When you feel a strong sensation in your heart move this heart energy up to the crown of your head. Feel the sensation build at the top of your head just as you did in your heart.
- As the energy builds from your focus and attention let this energy naturally flow out the top of your head and experience an expansion of your being.
- In this expansion remember and feel your pain and suffering and let it dissolve in the greater energy frequency of expansion.
- As you do this practice of self-compassion you will naturally become attuned to this higher vibration and frequency of love most of the time in your daily life.
- A modification of this practice is to connect with another person but feel their pain and as you release their condition through the top of your head you will touch into their expanded frequency in compassion for them.

Compassion is an important practice to develop for the end of your life.

Each of us will face our death alone. Others may support and help us in the final process of our dying with comfort and prayers, but it will be the practices of your lifetime and the ability to apply those practices during your dying that will lead you peacefully and gracefully into a continuation of your journey.

Source: <https://www.beliefnet.com/love-family/life-events/5-spiritual-practices-to-prepare-for-the-end-of-life.aspx>

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