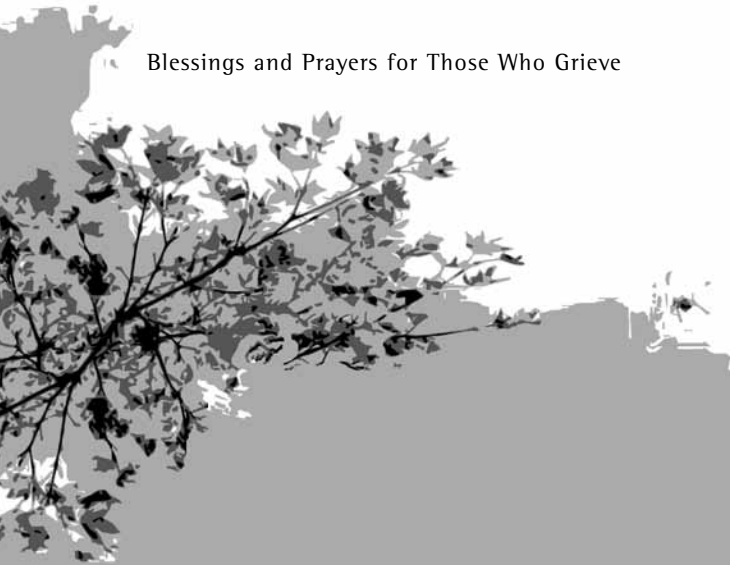


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LIVING WITH DYING

Blessings and Prayers for Those Who Grieve



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LIVING WITH DYING

The grief you know through the loss of your loved ones may be the most disruptive experience in your life. Grief, with its sense of loss and loneliness, comes with agonizing moments of doubt, fear, questioning, anger—even the feeling of being sick with emptiness and guilt.

There is support for you in your trouble. There is presence of family, friends, and church. There are memories of the past and hope for those who live on. There is, above all, the Lord and Giver of life, who holds you in His arms with comfort, pulls you up when you need support, and helps you endure as you live with your grief.

Blessings and Prayers for Those Who Grieve

You will find in this little book many words that are familiar. The selected Scriptures and hymns have been associated with the Church's ministry of comfort and ultimate hope to those who suffer with the death of a loved one. The devotions and prayers speak to our humanity as we figure out how to navigate the reality of death, whether the death of one we love, or the shadow of death that attends our own lives. In these, too, you will likely hear the echo of Scripture and the themes heard in the Church's worship and in the Sacraments, as these are the chief tools by which the Church does her work. The goal of all this is to bring you the comfort and peace the world cannot give, offer you ways to confront God with your questions and pain, and hear the hope—born and nurtured in faith—of a life beyond death with the God who cared enough to die so that we would not have to die forever.

Scot A. Kinnaman, Editor

Time for Prayer

.....

We appreciate prayer most when we are discouraged. True, the prayer of a believer changes things (James 5:16), but something else also happens: we are changed as God's Word works on our thinking. How wonderful that He has urged us to pray without ceasing!

But I call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and He hears my voice. He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me. . . . Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:16–18, 22)

We pray because we expect God to hear us. After all, as a part of His invitation for the prayers themselves, He promised to do so. He also promised to carry our burdens for us. Therefore, when in trusting prayer we “let” Him plan and set the best future for us and straighten out the past, our minds are put at ease and our anxieties quieted.

As this is true in sick days, so it is true every day. Prayer is an ongoing conversation with our loving Father. As we pray, His Word reminds us that He is the center of our lives and that His presence means blessings.

We give to God our burdens: sin, worry, loss, heartache, sickness. We also look to Him to supply our needs: forgiveness, increased faith, guidance, strength, relief, healing, patience, peace.

“Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan.” The assurance that “He hears my voice” will carry you through the long days and through the even longer nights.

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MEDITATIONS and COMFORT

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A Christmas Carol

“Christmas will be different this year,” said the new widow. Surely it would be; yet it would still be Christmas. It isn’t difficult to understand that homes where grief is still fresh will not dive into a world of tinsel madness. But Christmas is more than seasonal decorations, the red and the green, the lights and the tree.

Christmas is the celebration of the most needful event of mankind: the coming of the Savior. Easter, too, may be “different this year,” but the significance of the festival hasn’t changed. It still means victory. It still heralds resurrection. It still commemorates an emptied grave. For those who mourn, the traditional days of festivity may be different with an emptied chair, but celebrate the festival!

Christmas and Easter can only console, since it is in the incarnation and the resurrection that tears have meaning. And life has enormous meaning also.

Celebrate the festivals, the significance, the importance of the events. Celebrate them at worship. Celebrate them with family. Celebrate them with all

the superficialities stripped away. Celebrate them “with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8). Therein you will find the Child of the manger, and the Lord of the vacant tomb, and you will find solace for your aches and comfort for your anguish.

Celebrate them as milestones of spiritual growth, rather than memorials to a past that is gone. Remember fondly the good times that earmarked every Christmas and blessed every Easter. But remember also the inspiration, for the gaiety of those times was founded on a remarkable event in Bethlehem and an equally unheard-of happening at a cemetery near Calvary. As you celebrate the festival itself, you will discover God granting you peace as the angels sung of it, and a personal reality that ties your own Good Friday to the Lord’s conquest of death. You will experience the truth of the Christian life that begins with birth and sails on past death to resurrection.

The celebrations may be different this year and next, but they will be more meaningful than ever. Without the gimmicks, celebrate the festivals and be enriched beyond your fondest hope. You do have something to sing about.

20
Children

Treasure Island
.....

A lawyer once pointed out to me that though I may not have vast holdings, my greatest treasure is my children; thus I should designate in my will who should care for them in the event of our death, as my wife and I did. We may agree with the poet that “no man is an island,” yet we cannot help but see an individual with whom we would like to commune as an island of treasures.

Children are both “Treasure Islands” and treasured ones, for within their very beings God has put a bit of Himself, a little of the glory of heaven reflected in their eyes, something of His mystery, and much of His love. We celebrate their arrival and grow warm in the worn ruts of their growth. The psalmist has captured the thought well when he exults, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3).

It is when a child, so fresh a flower, so promising a one, is called from our parental arms to those of Him who is Parent to us all that the treasure’s real value is realized. The Pauline concept of having “this

treasure in jars of clay” is clearly relevant. The frailty of bone and sinew, of heart and brain, is all too much to face, yet face it we must—but in a context where the child belongs to God and is shared with us.

Christ’s love of little children is a classic truth. “Let the little children come,” He said when the disciples sought to prevent them (Matthew 19:14). He treasures their faithfulness and points to them as examples for us, even at the time of tragic loss: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3–4). Surely He who gave them life now grants them a dividend exceeding that of men, for He treasures children even more than we who are their earthly parents.

Our Lord was touched deeply by the death of youngsters. The Gospels tell us He called them to life: Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43), and the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17). These treasured islands were separated from Him and life no longer. It is so even now.

GRIEF: WHAT TO EXPECT

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

—1 Thessalonians 4:13

When we say, “I hope it rains,” we indicate that we do not know if it will, and even though we assume it will not, we would like it to rain. There is an embedded uncertainty when we use the word *hope*.

The opposite is true in the Scriptures. In the Bible, hope is not something uncertain or unsure. Because what we hope will come to pass is promised by God, and because God never lies, our hope is sure and certain. Hope, in the Bible, is faith directed toward the future. So when we speak of the *hope of the resurrection*, we are not saying, “I’m not sure if there will be a resurrection, but it would be nice if there were.” No. In the Scriptures, hope (like faith) is casting all doubt aside. We are then saying, “God has promised to raise me and all flesh from death, and give to me and all believers in Him eternal life. So I yearn and pray and eagerly expect the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

As Christians, we know that there is nothing wrong or sinful about grief. The Gospel sets us free to mourn and be sad at the death of our loved one. But we also rejoice that the Lord Jesus has overcome death, and He is with us in our grief. Death and sorrow cannot overcome Him, and so they cannot overcome us. The verse that speaks most clearly to the mourning Christian is 1 Thessalonians 4:13: “But we

do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” We grieve, we mourn, but this is not without hope. We cry and laugh; we weep and smile; we are sad and we trust in the Lord.

Psalm 23:4 offers a wonderful road map as we travel the road of grief:

Even 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.

We take comfort in the assurance that the Lord is with us. We do not grieve alone. And we take comfort in the knowledge that though the way seems dark and death seems very close, Jesus is on the path with us to care for us. There is no place for fear with the Lord at our side. Finally, we know that we are passing through the valley. We are not here to stay. The darkness of grief will give way to the joy of Jesus’ gift of forgiveness and life.

Grief brings with it different waves of emotions. Each person grieves differently, but there are some emotions that we might expect, and the hope we have in our Good Shepherd, Jesus, offers us comfort in the midst of these struggles.

Expect Shock . . .

and Acceptance

The news of a loved one's death is jarring, disorienting. "How can this be? This can't be true." In a moment, everything changes. The truth is sometimes too difficult to accept. It takes time for the reality of death to settle in.

The funeral service is an important part of this process of acceptance. In the funeral, the reality of death is matched with the reality of Jesus' death. No matter how much we are tossed around by our emotions, the love of Jesus is always secure.

It is often helpful for those who are mourning to tell the story of the death of loved ones. This helps grasp what has happened and place this death in the context of life. A listening ear is a true gift, and it is a wonderful privilege to be entrusted with these stories.

Expect Sadness . . .

and Joy

Death is sad. Funerals are sad. Empty homes and estate sales and holidays without our loved ones are

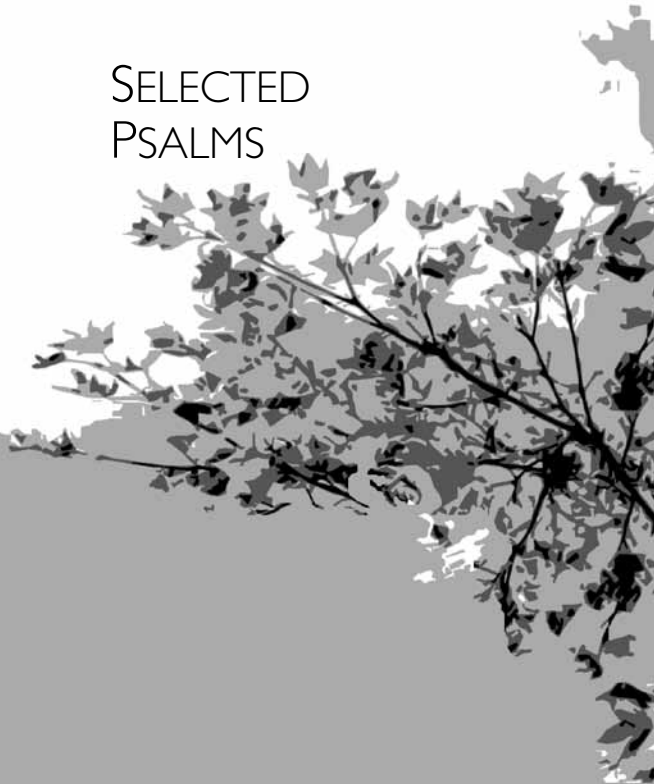
sad. There is a lingering sorrow that follows death, which we call mourning.

Jesus Himself knows what it is like to be sad. Jesus mourned the death of Lazarus. The shortest verse in the Bible concerns this very thing: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Jesus cried because He was sad.

The fact that Jesus, the Son of God Himself, knows the deep sadness that death causes gives us peace in the midst of tears. “If Jesus cries, it must be okay for me to cry also.” Yes, cry. Death is sad. At the same time we rejoice because the Lord’s Word comforts us in sadness: Jesus has overcome death and come out of the grave. He died for us and promises us His love and eternal life.

The devil would use our sadness to push us into a debilitating darkness, a deep sadness that threatens to choke out our faith and love. This is mourning without hope. Sometimes this deep sadness can lead to a physical sickness that needs doctors and medication to address. Other times it is a spiritual condition that needs a constant diet of the Lord’s Gospel. Many times it is a combination of these two. Family and your pastor are advisors to gauge if your sadness is dangerous to your health.

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PSALMS



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Answer Me When I Call

Psalm 4

- ¹ Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have given me relief when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
- ² O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?
How long will you love vain words and seek after
lies?
- ³ But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for
Himself;
the LORD hears when I call to Him.
- ⁴ Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be
silent.
- ⁵ Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.
- ⁶ There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?
Lift up the light of Your face upon us, O LORD!"
- ⁷ You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.
- ⁸ In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

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The Dead Will Return Isaiah 25:7–8; 35:10

^{25:7}[The Lord] will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
⁸He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of His people He will take away
from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

^{35:10}And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Waiting for the Lord Lamentations 3:22–26

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
His mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is Your faithfulness.
²⁴"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in Him."
²⁵The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,
to the soul who seeks Him.
²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

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and OTHERS

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After a Loved One's Expected Death

O God, I am filled with deep grief and loss. My loved one and I went through the caregiving journey together, and even though I was expecting this, it's still very difficult to know that he (she) is gone. Comfort me, and give me strength to fill the emptiness in my life. Fill me with Your peace and love. Receive my loved one into Your glorious kingdom so that he (she) may rest in Your love, peace, and joy forever. In Jesus' name. Amen. (1)

After the Death of a Loved One

Amid my tears, O Lord, I praise You that You have received (*name*) to Yourself in glory for all eternity. I thank You that You have brought him (her) to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Comfort all who mourn with the glorious hope of the resurrection and life eternal. Grant me grace to say with a believing heart, "Thy will be done," and to know that Your will is a good and gracious will, even in the present hour. Comfort me through Your Gospel, which promises strength and help to the troubled and weary. O Lord, forsake me not in this hour. Prepare me through Your Word and Sacrament for that day when You will call me to Yourself, that I may joyfully join the whole company of heaven to live with You forever; for Jesus' sake I ask it. Amen. (2)

Confident Hope

.....

Lord, I have lost the one whose life was entwined with mine. His (her) love was precious to me. This loss has grieved me deeply, and my emotions seem to run away at times. O Lord, don't let this hour of sorrow turn into despair. Don't let a feeling of resentment or anger sweep away my confidence in Your abiding love. Bring to mind the work of Your Son for my salvation. Give me the confident hope that through Him death has been conquered, and despite what I see and feel, death does not really have the last word. Comfort me with the victory of His resurrection. Roll away the clouds of my emotions that I may be warmed again by the bright light of hope, and that I may walk again in confidence and faith until the glorious day of the resurrection when we shall be reunited in heaven and together walk forever in the new creation, praising and glorifying You forever and ever. In Jesus' name. Amen. (7)

Courage

.....

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (8)

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They Say I'm Dying

I'm dying. I see it in the helpless look of my doctor's eyes. I hear it in the concerned voices of friends and family. Some are calling and visiting more often now; some are staying away. Cards are propped up all over my room. "Get well soon," they say. I know that will be, but not before I die. I feel the chill of death in my bones and smell it on my breath. Thoughts of death cloud my mind, especially in the dark hours of the night. Sleep is shallow and restless, yet I seem to crave sleep more and more. I am weary and my body aches. My appetite is gone. Each day seems to bring new losses, greater weakness.

Have mercy on me, O Lord. I fear Your judgments, for they are just and true. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and my death is just and well deserved. I am a sinner, from the moment You breathed life into me until the day of my death; I am a child of Adam, doomed to die. My sin is always before me, now more than ever, as I lie on my bed and ponder my life. O Father, how I have sinned against You and those around me! I am ashamed even to admit it. I sometimes try to minimize to others and say, "I've lived a good life," but I know the truth. Every day of my life has been soiled with sin. I am afraid of dying. I fear the unknown; I fear losing hold on my life.

And yet, by Your grace, I am unafraid. Your psalmist says, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His children" (Psalm 116:15), and the Holy Spirit cries out from heaven, "Blessed are [those] who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13). I cling to these words. Your Son Jesus, my

Lord, became man to take up my sins and my sinfulness in His own sinless humanity and to bury it all in His perfect death. He embraced me on His cross, and in Him I already am judged and crucified. Grant me to trust this with all my heart!

I dare not plead my good works before You, for they are hopelessly tarnished with sin. I do not plead my piety, nor even the depth of knowledge You have given me from the Holy Scriptures. I plead only the blood of Jesus Christ, Your Lamb who took away the sin of the world. I stand before You clothed only with His righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. He is my Rock; on Him I rest. He is my Redeemer; in Him I am hidden in safety.

I thank You, gracious Lord, for my Baptism. With Your hand and in Your name, You buried me in the death of Your Son. You raised me in His resurrection. You seated me with Him at Your right hand in glory. You made me Your beloved child and opened heaven to me, washing away all my sin. You gave me Your own testimony, that I can face my death with a clear conscience, through the merits of Jesus, my Savior. And You did all this long before I knew even to ask for it. By grace I am saved!

I thank You for the gift of Absolution, those precious words calling out to me, forgiving me, reminding me, urging me to trust Your promises. I thank You for faithful pastors who preached the Word of forgiveness to me. I thank You for the company of the saints, my fellow pilgrims in Your holy Church—for their encouragements, their prayers, their works of mercy, their examples of faithfulness.

I thank You for the body and the blood of Your Son,

Jesus Christ, my Lord. I go to His holy Supper as though I were going to my own death, so that I might go to my death as though going to His holy Supper. Surely, my cup overflows with mercy, and I can depart in peace, according to Your Word.

O Father in heaven, let Your name be hallowed in my death. Grant me to honor You in my dying breath, not that I may earn Your favor, but that those around me, whom I love and for whom Your Son has died, might also fear and trust in You.

Let Your kingdom come, that I may see You face-to-face, and live eternally under the reign of Jesus Christ, my Lord who died for me.

Let Your good and gracious will be done with me. Hinder and put to death the will of the devil, who would plague me with doubt and disbelief; the world, that would lead me to despair; and my own sinful flesh, that would drive me into myself and away from You.

Comfort those around me—my family, my friends, my neighbors, my doctors and nurses and all who care for me, my co-workers, my congregation and pastors. Bless them with Your strength in this time of trial. Remind them that You are the God of the living, whose Son conquered death by His dying and rising. Set the joy of Easter and the open, empty tomb of Jesus before their eyes, and wipe away every tear of grief. Encourage them with the knowledge that those who die in the Lord are not lost, nor are they far away, but they are as near as the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom live all the saints, joined together as one body, as we will see with our own eyes on the Day of Resurrection. Amen. (26)