

Appendix A—Discussion Questions

Topic as a whole—

A recent AARP Bulletin ran an article “Truth About Aging”, which produced the results of a survey done among Americans of various ages. One conclusion was that people aren't afraid of death; in fact, the fear of death decreases with age. What elderly people really feared was a loss of control of their circumstances. What is your reaction to this conclusion?

Is our society dealing with death realistically or is death being pushed to the margins of society and we refuse to deal with it until it looms?

Dying is a difficult and painful process. Does it make sense to talk about “aging into a good death”? Is talking about the “art of dying” or a “good death” an affront in and of itself?

Some have described death as a taboo subject of conversation for many in the modern “West”? Do you agree? Why might that be so?

Longing for a Better Country—

What do you think of Hebrews 11:13-16? Do modern Christians think this way? Do you think that modern Christians in the “West” are too comfortably at home in the world?

Chapter 1—The Player's Stage

Do you think the melancholy reflected in the quote from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in Chapter 1 reflects modern attitudes? Do modern attitudes strike you as cavalier about death in general, while we quail at the thought of our own imminent death?

React to some statements and attitudes expressed by the author of perhaps the most formative and influential modern book on death [Dr. Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*]:

On Death and Dying, p. 91: “She [one of Kubler-Ross' patients] asked me something that I was never asked before, namely, to read her a chapter from the Bible ... I did not enjoy this assignment as I found it peculiar and beyond the usual things I was asked to do. ... I recall the dreaded thought that some of my colleagues might come in and laugh at my new role, and I was relieved that nobody entered her room during this 'session'”.

On Death and Dying, p. 150: “It might be helpful if more people would talk about death and dying as an intrinsic part of life just as they do not hesitate to mention when someone is expecting a new baby.”

On Death and Dying, p. 165, introducing a chapter on the patient's family, she quotes from Tagore, *the Fugitive*, Part II, XXI:

The father came back from the funeral rites. His boy of seven stood at the window, with eyes

wide open and a golden amulet hanging from his neck, full of thoughts too difficult for his age. His father took him in his arms and the boy asked him, “Where is mother?” “In heaven,” answered his father, pointing to the sky.

The boy raised his eyes to the sky and long gazed in silence. His bewildered mind sent abroad into the night the question, “Where is heaven?” No answer came: and the stars seemed like burning tears of that ignorant darkness.

On Death and Dying, p. 183, later in that same chapter introduced above, she has this to say: “Once the patient dies, I find it cruel and inappropriate to speak of the love of God”.

Chapter 2—Destined for Glory

What do you make of Martin Luther writing about his own death—”to joyfully and confidently embark on a path towards God”? Should modern Christians think about death as Christians in the past have? Did those earlier believers think about death too much or in odd ways? Should we come up with our own attitudes about dying?

How should Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation affect how Christians think about and approach their own deaths?

Have you thought much about being a co-heir with Christ in glory? What could that possibly mean?

Along the Way—

In general—We speak of aging in terms of the “long afternoon of life”. Others speak of “gradual dying”. Have you experienced “gradual dying” or care-giving for a dying loved one? What are the positive and negative effects of “gradual dying”?

Chapters 3-4—But One Thing/Keep Buggerin' On:

Why is it important to maintain relationships and meaningful goals throughout life? How can people stay active and live meaningful lives into their elderly years?

How can the church play more of a role in helping elderly members do this? How might churches do a better job at helping elderly members stay integrated in the congregation and living with a biblical vision of their final years?

Chapter 5—Getting Faith Airborne:

Philip Yancey wrote a best-selling book *Disappointed With God*. Its theme resonated with many people. Has your faith strengthened or weakened over time? What tends to strengthen it? What tends to

undermine it?

Is praising God a meaningful aspect of your prayer life? What does praising God unleash in your soul?

Chapter 6—Beside Quiet Waters:

There are wonderful advantages to our elderly years. Take a moment to list the ones that come readily to mind. Which ones top your list?

What can you do to nurture your inner life in the late afternoon of your life's journey? What type of "rhythm of living" makes sense for this stage of life? What similarities/differences do you notice as compared to previous stages?

Chapter 7—Is Your House in Order:

Do you have a will? Does it include medical directives? Have you updated it? Are the beneficiary distribution directions for property passing outside your will consistent with the terms of your will? Do the fiduciaries you have chosen share your values? Have you discussed your arrangements with your children/heirs?

Do you have financial issues? Do you have a plan to address them? Do you need help and a place to go to get it?

Are there family relationships that need attending to? Do you regularly have family reunions? Is it easy to express sincere emotion in your family circles? Why? Why not?

Have you made arrangements for the possibility that you will not be able to adequately care for yourself in the future? Have you thought about purchasing long-term care insurance?

Do you want to be buried or cremated? Where will you be interred? Have you planned your funeral or memorial service?

Chapter 8—Losing Power, Losing Place, Losing Significance:

We are not what we do. We are not what we have. We are not what others may think of us. Where does your self-worth and your hope really reside?

What can you do now to be useful? To contribute to a worthy work?

Chapters 9-10—Liberty of Limits; On the Bosom of the Lord:

Are you impatient when thwarted or limited? Are you getting better about this as you age or worse?

Do you praise God for your limit situations? Is praise a substantial part of your prayer life or a brief preamble to your list of petitions?

Do you struggle with regrets? Over what exactly? Do you worry a lot? Have you consciously given these things to the Lord? Are you like me, and constantly take them back?

What has helped you deal with regrets and worries?

Chapter 11—Grace in Letting Go:

In a recent survey, the results of which were reported in an AARP Bulletin, one conclusion from the survey was that what elderly people really feared was a loss of control of their circumstances. Does that weigh on you—

- Your physical and mental well-being
- Loss of loved ones, friends, acquaintances
- Loss of career and productive activity
- Moving from our home and giving up personal possessions
- Loss of independence and self-sufficiency
- Setting aside hobbies and past-times

Chapter 12—Through the Night Watches:

Are there particular times when you are vulnerable to temptation, negative thinking, or discouragement?

Are there “thin spaces” in your living, arenas where you more easily sense the presence of God?

Into His Presence—

Chapter 13—On Grieving:

Half a century ago, C.S. Lewis wrote: “I’m aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet.” Do you think a bereaved person might say the same thing today?

Do you think that older ways of formalized communally expressed grief (e.g. wearing black or special jewelry to signal being “in mourning”) would be a good thing to begin doing again?

If we as Christians are not supposed to mourn “as those who have no hope,” how should we mourn?

It has been said that it is through sorrow that Christians discover joy. Do you agree? Has this been true in your life?

What beliefs should a Christian funeral reflect? How does a funeral shape the way someone mourns for a loved one? What is the difference between a Christian funeral and a memorial service? Is there a difference?

Chapter 14—On Sickness and Suffering:

What hardships in life have you faced that, while very difficult, turned out for the good? Would you choose that hardship again because of the result it produced?

Can you give examples of how people who have suffered became more compassionate, helping people? What is needed to ensure that the experience of suffering and bereavement make us better people, not bitter people?

It is difficult to be patient when you're not feeling well. We can become "so sick of being sick". What advice would you give to yourself now for an end of life illness then?

Chapter 15—In the Valley of the Shadow:

What concerns do you have about the end of your life? What are your biggest fears? What things do you need to resolve?

What do you want your last days to look like? Have you ever told anyone your end-of-life wishes?

How do you need to spiritually prepare to meet God?

Do you feel squeamish about being with someone who is dying?

How do you balance the desire to use medicine to fight off disease with the need to accept death? When should there be a shift from fighting the threatening disease to comfort care?

Have you thought about what you want for your end-of-life care?

—For caregivers:

Have you had to change your life plans in order to take care of a family member? How has that affected your life? Are you grateful for that window of time? Are you bitter?

What challenges did you face as a caregiver? What did you gain from the experience?

Has someone's role as a caregiver caused conflict in your family? Have you resolved those issues?

Many of us live significant distances from family members. How has that affected the ways in which you maintain relationships and care for loved ones?