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Making Peace With Our Biggest Fear

**7 Ways to
Celebrate Life**

**The Best
Plan For You**

**Spiritual
Comfort**

**Learning
To Listen**



ANGELIC HEALTH

PALLIATIVE CARE • HOSPICE CARE

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The Best Plan *for You*

Life often feels out of control for many of us, even when we are not facing life or death decisions.

By *Domenica Rafferty*

Making plans is our way of moving forward and making decisions that feel right. Making plans often alleviates fear or anxiety when facing major changes while allowing us to open up our creativity and imagination to experience life on our terms.

When confronted with our own mortality, some of us will attempt to “get our affairs in order” by meeting with our accountant, lawyer, clergy or funeral director and overlook one of the most comforting resources available during life’s most challenging time.

Hospice invites us to be involved in the planning of how we want to live during the limited time we may have left and how we want to die in comfort and dignity.

Many patients with life-limiting illnesses have used hospice to help manage symptoms so that the end of life can be a time of dignity and

comfort for patients, families and friends.

A popular misconception is that hospice is for the last few hours or days before death. Patients are eligible for hospice care if diagnosed with six months or less to live and can leave hospice care at any time.

Unfortunately, most people don’t receive hospice care until the final weeks or even days of life which causes many patients to not fully experience the care and quality of the hospice relationship.

Dr. Ira Byock, a leading palliative care physician and author of *Dying Well* and *The Best Care Possible*, emphasizes that “we can relieve the suffering of almost everyone that we care for if we have the time to prepare.”

Hospice staff are on call 24 hours a day to help patients in pain and can also train caregivers on how to administer emergency pain

medications that take effect before nurses arrive.

Hospice doctors, nurses, clergy, health aides and volunteers assist the patient with planning and implementing the best care possible for a person with a terminal illness.

For some people, such plans might include having extended visits with loved ones, visiting a favorite place, or organizing family photos.

For others, the most important thing might be to live out their days in peace and comfort in their home or a hospice facility.

Hospice aides can also relieve some of the burdens on family members during a patient’s final weeks and months by assisting in personal care, while hospice volunteers can provide caregivers with a few hours respite each week.

The preparedness of hospice offers the time to create the best plan for your life. ✕

Spiritual Matters

By *Beth Carlton*

According to a survey by the Pew Research Group, 89% of Americans say that they believe in God.

Even though research indicates that people value spiritual care and spiritual well-being, many of us may find it difficult to put our belief into practice during life’s most difficult time.

When illness occurs, many people may want to feel a sense of purpose in their lives and may begin to reflect on their past and, in doing so, may find themselves asking difficult questions about life and its meaning.

After being diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease at 59 and knowing her life was coming to an end (she died at the age of 64), Pat Summitt who will be remembered for winning more women’s basketball games than any other college coach, male or female, said, “God doesn’t take things away to be cruel. He takes things away to make room for other things. He takes things away to lighten us. He takes things away so we can fly.”

When the physical body becomes frail, our inner being can become stronger as our spirituality is awakened. Some people may experience a desire to resolve issues with family

and friends as they detach from this world and get ready for the next stage—whatever they believe that to be.

When someone says they feel overwhelmed or sad about dying, try not to dismiss such feelings, which are deeply important at this time.

You may want to suggest coping techniques such as relaxation, meditation, writing down thoughts and feelings, talking to a hospice chaplain, prayer, yoga, reading or listening to audio recordings of sacred books.

“God doesn’t take things away to be cruel. He takes things away to make room for other things. He takes things away to lighten us. He takes things away so we can fly.”

When someone reveals feelings about spiritual matters, you do not need to have an answer to these profound questions. Sit quietly and allow time for listening, thoughtfulness and stillness. Be aware of your own thoughts and feelings, as your emotions may come to the surface.

Trying to find a spiritual practice that feels right may cause someone to experience a range of new emotions, but it is during the wild and sometimes turbulent ride that a loved one may make new discoveries which can lead to a more joyful and meaningful life. ✕

As a hospice volunteer, Beth Carlton has watched lives transformed through spiritual awakenings.

Learning to Listen

By David Kessler

Richard Phillips and his sister Paula greeted me as I stepped off the elevator on the second floor of the hospital where their mother, Frances, was being treated for advanced cardiac disease.

"My mother can't talk about the fact that she's dying," Paula said, as we sat in the sparse hospital family room.

"Our mother is incredible. She's a true survivor," Richard began, recalling how she worked at JC Penney to support her five children when their father left.

"After all that," Paula said, in tears, "I can't believe that she could be leaving us now."

"I'd like to meet her," I said. As they walked me to the room, they cautioned me, "Remember, she doesn't know she's dying."

I saw Frances Phillips' blue eyes light up as her children introduced me. When they left to go to the cafeteria, she looked at me as if to let me in on a secret.

"If you're here to tell me I'm dying, I know. Nobody wants to die, but it's not like I didn't know this was coming

at some point. It's amazing how people talk around it." She smiled and said, "I bet you can talk about it."

Indeed I could, I told her. Then I asked if I could tell her family that she knew she was dying and could talk about it.

"I guess it's time," she said, as if the charade was up. When Richard and Paula returned, we went into the hallway, where we were joined by their brother, Frank.

"She knows she's dying," I told them. "She knew long before I got here."

"Our mother, who can't talk about dying, told you, a complete stranger, that she's dying?" Frank said.

"Maybe because I'm a complete stranger, it's easier for her," I replied.

"Well, what do we do now?" Paula asked. "Do we still tell her to try to get better? Or do we say, 'Sorry you're dying?' Now I'm more confused than ever."

"Maybe you can say something like, 'Mom, I hope you can make it through this, but if that isn't meant to be, I'm here, whichever way this road goes.'"

Listening is a powerful way to offer comfort. Listen to them complain. Listen to them cry. Listen to them laugh. Listen to them reminisce. Listen to them talk about the weather, or about death.

When You Don't Know What To Say

What do you say to the dying? Most of us are afraid what we say will be either too threatening or too trivial. We wonder if talking about the things they loved to do will cheer them up or make them sad.

It's fine to say, "I don't know what to say to you. Should we talk about baseball or your chemotherapy?" And it's all right to talk about dying. Avoiding a conversation about death won't make it go away, but talking about it can bring life into your relationship.

Listening is a powerful way to offer comfort. Listen to them complain. Listen to them cry. Listen to them laugh. Listen to them reminisce. Listen to them talk about the end of life.

Remember the days when we would take family members to the airport and wait at the gate until they left? And when they returned, we'd meet them at the gate, not curbside or in the baggage claim area.

The concept of "walking to the gate" symbolizes the way we should approach life and death. Today's newborn is "met at the gate" by his father in the delivery room, not in the waiting room. We should do the same for the dying.

June, 92, was living in a retirement home when her doctor found a tumor wrapped around her aorta. Given her age and poor general health, treatment was not advised.

Her son and daughter-in-law told June, "As you get sicker, we don't

want you to go into a hospital and be cared for by people who don't know you. We want you to die in our home. Between us and the kids, we'll manage. You've always been there for us, now we'll be there for you."

We walk our loved ones to the gate when we bring them home to die. We walk them to the gate when we let them know we will be with them. We finish our unfinished business when we say what needs to be said. We cry with them and for them, and we hold their hands as we walk them to the gate. ❖

David Kessler is the author of *The Needs of the Dying* and co-author with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross of *Life Lessons and On Grief and Grieving*.

7 Ways to celebrate life

by Marlene Prost

Peering into the past and examining the events that gave life meaning can be a surprisingly uplifting experience. Many families find that celebrating the life of a terminally ill loved one brings everyone closer. It can inspire candid talk and laughter. What's more, the process gives the ill person, who may be feeling vulnerable, a sense of control over his or her own legacy.

These seven loving ideas can help you all cherish old memories while creating new ones.

1 Create a memorial DVD

Thanks to video and digital technology, families can select photographs, slides, and action shots of their loved one and put them to favorite music on a DVD that the "star" can enjoy now.

Helping to plan the DVD gives a dying person a sense of control at a time when they are losing control over many things, said Carol Weaver, director of enrichment at a hospice for the past 10 years. "They're leaving a living legacy for their children and grandchildren," she explains. "And it's something for family members to keep and cherish."

2 Record a life review

We all want to know that our life mattered. That's why the formal "life review" has become a popular process. Prompted by prepared questions, a dying loved one is encouraged to talk about life experiences, from early childhood on, while the family records the conversation.

"Just give suggestions, like when were you born? What was the favorite toy you played with? What are you afraid of?" Weaver says. "Not just facts and figures. Evoking emotions presents a more comprehensive view of their life."

3 Share a personal message

Sometimes it's awkward to tell even your most beloved relative or friend how you really feel. Another way: Make an audio or video recording of yourself sharing reminiscences and feelings. Weaver recalls a young woman whose taciturn grandfather wouldn't let her talk about her feelings for him. Putting them on tape, she told Weaver, allowed her the opportunity to have closure.

"Patients are reassured that their life had meaning, and that they are loved and respected," she adds—even those who are reluctant to hear it face-to-face.

4 Weave tangible memories

Tributes can take non-media forms, too. For example, family and friends who live too far to visit can contribute to a quilt made up of fabric squares that capture memories and sentiments. Send everyone a square to embellish or decorate with ink, embroidery, or other mementoes. A T-shirt collector saw his favorites assembled into a blanket, which was passed on later to his son.

Another popular trend: Huggable memorial teddy bears made out of a loved one's clothing.

5 Record day-to-day living

Some of our happiest family memories are of everyday life: Going fishing, watching a child's music recital, playing ball. One grandmother asked for a videotape of herself baking cookies with her granddaughter. Try turning on a camera set up on a tripod during dinner on a good day. Play back these relationship-building moments later, on not-so-good days.

6 Leave a work of art

Few of us ever get to write that novel or record that hit song. But the creative process can take on urgency when time grows short. One 35-year-old hospice patient wrote a book for his five-year-old son, explaining every step of his illness. Weaver says her hospice's bereavement department still uses the book.

Music was a big part of life for another 39-year-old father who was debilitated by strokes. With the help of his music therapist, he surprised his eight-year-old daughter with a song about a father putting his daughter to bed. The song ended with words she'd always say: "I love you all the way to God and back."

"This is a CD just for her, she'll have the rest of her life," Weaver says.

7 Make a wish list come true

Many of us carry around a "bucket list" of things we've always wanted to do, or would love to do one more time. Often you can find ways to turn even unlikely wishes into realities, with a few modifications.

One 92-year-old hospice patient, a former flight instructor who once owned an airport, wanted to fly again—something he hadn't done in more than 40 years. His loved ones arranged for him to go up in a four-seat plane with a flying instructor, his daughter, and a nurse. In mid-flight, he leaned over and said, "I haven't felt this young in a long time." He even took over the controls for 20 minutes.

You can bet those are 20 minutes both he and his daughter will cherish forever. ✕

Marlene Prost is a Pennsylvania-based freelancer who specializes in writing about health care issues.

Making Peace with Our Biggest Fear

By Dr. Ken Druck



Our fear of death begins when we're kids. Perhaps we had to face the mystifying idea of impermanence when a beloved pet, parent or grandparent died. The stark reality that this loved one was really gone—and gone forever, was both devastating and terrifying. From early childhood, when we're introduced to the concept of "futureless-ness"—that is, old age and eventually death, there are few things as difficult for us to deal with. Facing down the fear of dying requires great strength, humility and spiritual fortitude. But, as you will see, it's worth the effort.

Summoning the courage to quell our fears and come to terms with our mortality may be one of the most challenging things we ever do—but it may be one of the best things we can do to improve the quality of our lives. Freeing up the space in our minds and hearts where fear has resided and replacing it with newfound peace, courage and understanding is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.

Here are several things that have helped me, and those I've had the honor and privilege of working with over the years, to make peace and even find joy as they near the end of their lives:

1. Treat Conquering Fear as a Process

Loosening the grip of death's terrifying, paralyzing and often, depressing hold on us comes with learning to calm our hearts and our thoughts, deepen our faith, bolster our courage, surrender our need for control, give a voice to our fear and reimagine the greater possibilities. The goal is not to obliterate our trepidation about dying or to never again be afraid. This may not even be attainable for most folks. We can, however, learn how to contain, channel and ease our fears. And this alone will be enough to lighten our hearts. ▶

2. Allow Humble Unknowingness

We do not know with 100 percent certainty what happens when we die. Or where, if anywhere, we were before we were born. Unknowingness is a natural part of the human experience. We can try to fight it, pretending we know exactly what's going to happen when we pass, or we can remain humble, seek deeper understanding and keep the faith that there may be something greater in store for us when we pass from this life.

3. Don't Try to Outsmart, Outrun or Outmaneuver It

The fear of death resides in our DNA. We're programmed to live... and to do everything in our power to survive. Since the thought of dying can be overwhelming, we try to run and hide from it. Opening ourselves to the possibilities of life after death is natural. And so is conducting honest inquiries into the true nature of life and death.

Our capacity for true inner strength, faith, reflection and spiritual awakening is limited if the only thing we do is recite rituals and pray to be saved by a higher power. Assured a ticket to life everlasting in heaven, we cling to blind faith and forgo the opportunity to cultivate "organic" faith. The benefits of faith derived from courageously dealing with, rather than "spiritually bypassing," our fears make all the difference when it comes to making peace.

4. Embrace Uncertainty and Choose to Believe

That we undergo a transition from this life when we die is indisputable. There are "believers" and "nonbelievers" who claim to live with a clear sense of certainty about

exactly what that is. And then, there are people like me, who are uncertain about the true nature of life and death—but choose to place our bets anyway.

I choose to believe, for example, that when I die, I'll be reunited with my daughter Jenna, who died tragically while studying abroad at age 21. I remain hopeful and humble, vigilant and patient, in my uncertainty about the mysterious nature of death.

5. Believe That Love Does Live On

I have found some measure of peace, and my heart is calm most of the time. But there are times when I'm visited by fear, doubt and profound sorrow. Staring into the abyss, scared that I might be telling myself a story to stave off sorrow and fear... I find the idea of a great nothingness to be quite frightening. However, these occasional lapses into despair, when I feel defenseless, are offset by the times when I feel at peace.

Accepting life's terms, reconciling that we don't get to live forever and being eternally grateful for the blessing of having lived, gives me peace. So does being intimately connected to my daughter in the spiritual realm, bonded by an undying love. From the day of her death in 1996 to this very moment, I've experienced the love that never dies.

Telling Jenna that I love her—feeling her love, and even her presence, has soothed my heart and assured me that love is greater than death. And that love does go on. While my daughter's death has been a source of unspeakable pain in my life, it has also calmed my fears about death. Whatever and whenever that transition is,

I will hope to be joining her, my parents, grandparents and others I have loved someday. And that's OK.

6. Pay the Good Forward

When we make strides in reconciling the fact that we're here on lease, we can decide to live from gratitude and pay the good fortune, blessings, gifts and miracles we've been able to experience forward to our kids, grandkids and future generations.

Leaving a legacy of love is in direct contrast with living from fear, jealousy, bitterness and resentment. Those who fail to face down their fears of dying think nothing of taking it all down with them when they die. They become reckless and/or indifferent to the kind of future they're leaving behind for future generations. The peace afforded to those who choose to look beyond their own lifetime and pay the good in their lives forward allows them to let go when it's time. And to do so knowing they have left a legacy of love from which others will benefit.

And keep in mind, the following ideals of what I call "courageous living" can be of great help when facing down the fear of death:

- Stay humble, and find peace in your unknowingness. You're a part of something so big that it is unfathomable. The true nature of the universe—where life comes from and where it goes when you die—is an unfolding mystery. Just ask the stars.
- Cultivate a calm mind that allows naturally arising fears and doubts to come and go. Learning to breathe and release even your primordial fears is a form of surrender.

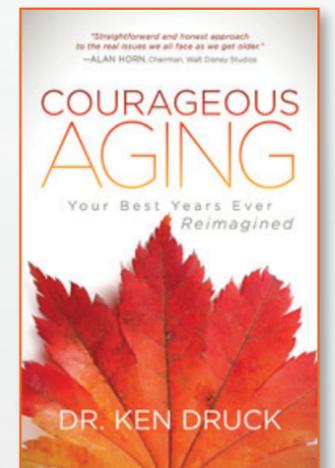
You can make peace with life itself as it really is.

- Keep the faith that whatever you believe in your heart is true—or what you wish to be true. It's okay to abide by a hoped-for narrative without knowing if it's entirely accurate or not.
- It's also just fine to have faith in a divine truth without apology or justification. Do so while respecting and honoring the rights of others who may have a different view.

The Process of a Lifetime

Dealing with death occurs over the course of a lifetime. When it comes to accepting the inevitable, we are all works in progress and a certain amount of existential unrest is part of being human. The seasons, changes, losses, and transitions of life demand upgrades in our operating systems. Summoning courage, faith, understanding and humility requires great determination. Allowing for, and accepting, life's terms, as well as voicing our objections to the parts that are sad and scary, is all part of the journey. May you find peace. ✨

Dr. Ken Druck's book *Courageous Aging: Your Best Years Ever Reimagined* offers practical and inspirational guidance on making peace with, and finding joy in, every stage and season of life.





Your diagnosis
is not your choice,
how you live is

Having a serious illness comes with many challenges. At Angelic Health we recognize that you are not your diagnosis. Our team of healthcare professionals customizes a care plan to meet your unique needs, one that will provide you with the best quality of life possible.

Angelic Health provides comprehensive palliative, hospice and transitional care services to southern New Jersey patients and professional support for their families. We are endorsed by the Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC), which reflects our agency's dedication and commitment to meeting the standards that demonstrate a higher level of performance and patient care.

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