

Preparing to Die Well – Lesson 1

What it Means to Die Well

Class Objectives

Here is the lesson plan I hope to follow during our next several weeks together:

- Lesson 1 – What it Means to “Die Well”
- Lesson 2 – The Christian’s View of God and Man
- Lesson 3 – Healthcare Directives and General Preparations
- Lesson 4 – The Christian’s View of Sin and Salvation
- Lesson 5 – Inheritance, Wills and Living Trusts
- Lesson 6 – The Christian’s View of the Heaven and Hell
- Lesson 7 – Planning Your Funeral in Advance
- Lesson 8 – The Christian’s view of Death and Dying
- Lesson 9 – What to Do Immediately after Your Loved One Dies
- Lesson 10 – The Christian’s View of the Intermediate State and the Resurrection
- Lesson 11 – Final Thoughts

During each lesson, I will give you “The Lighter Side of Dying” as I did above. I will also include quotations from various well-respected theological teachers on different aspects of dying and examples of those who have “died well” in many, but perhaps not all, of the lessons.

What it Means to “Die Well

In today’s world, if you Google the term “die well,” most of the articles are about palliative care during suffering or about “dying with dignity” that preserves the dying person’s wishes. These are the world’s resignation that there is nothing you can do about dying except to make yourself or your loved one as comfortable as possible and to fulfill your or their “bucket list.”

But, in the Puritan’s day, to “die well” most simply meant that you were prepared to meet God, that you had lived your life well, and that you were ready to move into eternity. The English Puritan Edmund Barker said, “Every Christian hath two great works to do in the world, to live well, and to die well.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “We are flying, as on some mighty eagle's wing, swiftly on towards eternity. Let us, then, talk about preparing to die. It is the greatest thing we have to do, and we have soon to do it, so let us talk and think something about it.”

How Christians and Non-Christians View Life and Death

| View Of ... | Christian | Non-Christian |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Creation | By God in His image | By Chance and Time |
| Purpose | To Glorify God | To Glorify Self |
| Spiritual Nature | Evil, apart from Christ | Good, within Himself |
| Spiritual Position | In Christ and the Holy Spirit | In the World and the Flesh |
| God | Faith and Love | Unbelief or Hatred |
| Man | Love of Neighbor, Humility | Love of Self, Pride |
| Life | Purpose and Meaning | Meaningless |
| Disposition | Joy and Contentment | Anger and Bitterness |
| Future | Hope | Despair |
| Death | Peace and Comfort | Fear and Anxiety |

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Preparing Today to “Die Well” Tomorrow

Philip Ryken, the former senior pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia after James Montgomery Boice, wrote a 2006 article entitled “Dying Well” on Tenth Presbyterian’s website.

Ryken said, “... not everyone dies well, but only those who are strong in faith, bold in courage, and well prepared to meet their God... We can prepare to die well by thinking often about death and the life to come.”

The article mentions several things you can do to prepare to “die well”:

1. Learn what the Bible says about death.
2. Pay attention to the spiritual experience of others in death and grief. Are they dying well? If so, then consider what you can learn from their example. If not, then consider why not.
3. Pay attention when you go to other people’s funerals or graveside services.
4. Pay attention to brothers and sisters that you read about in good Christian biographies.
5. Sing great hymns about dying well and meditate upon the meaning of their words.
6. Pray that, as you die, you would hold on to your faith and let others see God’s grace in you.
7. Exercise good stewardship of your earthly possessions for your families.
8. Reconcile any broken relationships so not to leave any unfinished business behind.
9. Practice self-denial and sacrifice yourself for the sake of others, like Jesus did. If you are putting yourself to death every day, then the day of death itself will turn out to be the day you have been preparing for all your life.
10. But the most important thing you can do to prepare to die well is to put your faith in Jesus Christ.

An Example of Dying Well

Archibald Alexander was born 1772 in Virginia to Scottish immigrant parents. He attended William Graham’s Timber Ridge College in Lexington, VA at age 10. Alexander was ordained in 1791 at age 21, and he pastored churches in Virginia and later Philadelphia. He received his D.D. from the College of New Jersey in 1810. He became the first professor appointed to the newly created Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812, continued as its “principal” instructor until 1840, and he remained there until his death in 1851 at the age of 71. He was a prolific author and great influencer of other theologians including Charles Hodge. His book, “Thoughts on Religious Experience,” was written and published in 1844.

You can download the book as a PDF from several sources. His final chapters are entitled “Deathbed of the Believer”, “Remarks on Deathbed Exercises”, “Preparation for Death”, and “A Prayer for One Who Feels that He is Approaching the Borders of Another World”.

In his chapter entitled “Deathbed of the Believer,” he relates the following story about one lady on her deathbed.

I recollect a sickly but pious lady who, with a profusion of tears, expressed her anxiety and fear in the view of her approaching end. There seemed to be ground for her foreboding apprehensions because, from the beginning of her profession, she had enjoyed no comfortable assurance— but was of the number of those who, though they “fear God, and obey the voice of his servant, yet walk in darkness and have no light” (Isa 50:10) of comfort. But mark the goodness of God and the fidelity of the Great Shepherd. Some months afterwards I saw this lady on her deathbed—and

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was astonished to find that Christ had delivered her entirely from her bondage. She was now near to her end and knew it—but she shed no tears now but those of joy and gratitude. All her darkness and sorrow were gone. Her heart glowed with love to the Redeemer, and all her anxiety now was to depart and be with Jesus. There was, as it were, a beaming of heaven in her countenance. I had before tried to comfort her—but now I sat down by her bedside to listen to the gracious words which proceeded from her mouth, and could not but send up the fervent aspiration, "O let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like hers!" (Num 23:10) Then I knew that there was one who had conquered death, and him who has the power of death; for Satan, to the last moment, was not permitted to molest her.