

September 20, 2009

Courage to Change the Things We Can: Decision Making At the End of Life

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(Philippians 1:21–30 NRSV) For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. {22} If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. {23} I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; {24} but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. {25} Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, {26} so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. {27} Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, {28} and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. {29} For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well-- {30} since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Last week we talked about having the courage to accept the things that we cannot change → and the thing that we cannot change more than any other that we must learn to accept is the reality that we are all going to die.

We can ignore it

We can pretend that it will happen to everyone else

We can stick our head in the sand

BUT, eventually we all have to face it.

We all are going to die!

Today, I want to encourage us to have the courage to change the things that we can before it is too late.

We could break this out in a multitude of ways, but I want to focus on three primary places where we need to – or at least have the opportunity to, make decisions:

- Medical Decisions
- Financial Decisions

- Personal Decisions

I know that this is not an exhaustive list, and I am sure as we talk about this topic in greater detail on Wednesday Evenings as a part of WWE that we can dig even deeper!

I also want to give a disclaimer – I am not an expert on any of these areas – I just know that we need to deal with them!

Let's begin by looking at some of the Medical Decisions that we need to make.

I start with a question:

Have you talked with your family about your medical desires?

Have you selected someone to have the power to make medical decisions for you if you became incapacitated?

Let's look at a few of the choices we should be talking about and some of the legal vehicles that can be used to make them happen.

LIVING WILL

A Living Will is the most basic directive, and it specifies well in advance whether or not a person is to have their life prolonged through artificial or extreme methods.

You indicate which treatments you do or do not want applied to you in the event you either suffer from a terminal illness or are in a permanent vegetative state.

A living will does not become effective unless you are incapacitated; until then you'll be able to say what treatments you do or don't want. They usually require a certification by, at least, your doctor and often it requires a second doctor certify that you are either suffering from a terminal illness or permanently unconscious before they become effective as well.

Let's say that you suffer a heart attack, but otherwise do not have any terminal illness and are not permanently unconscious, a living will does not have any effect. You would still be resuscitated, even if you had a living will indicating that you don't want life prolonging procedures. A living will is only used when your ultimate recovery is hopeless.

For situations where you are incapacitated and therefore not able to speak for yourself, but your health is not so dire that your living will becomes effective, you should have a health care power of attorney or health care proxy. A health care power of attorney is a legal document that gives someone else the authority to make health care decisions for you in the event you are incapacitated. The person you designate to make health care decisions on your behalf is supposed to consider what you would want, so be sure to talk with them about it. It may be a difficult conversation, but you're asking someone to take on a great burden for you – letting them know what you want lessens that burden.

HOSPICE CARE

Are you all familiar with Hospice?

We are so blessed to have the Riley House in our community – a place where many of you have volunteered over the years, and a number of our families have used.

Hospice is a philosophy and type of care that seeks to make the last six months of a terminally ill patient as whole and comfortable as possible.

Unfortunately, most families don't even think about Hospice until it is very late in the ball game and then they are afraid to talk about it, because they think it means giving up. Which means that Hospice does not get involved until the end is very near. The average stay at Riley House is very short → I believe it is less than a week on average.

Hospice can help the person who is in the last stages of life, as well as the family deal with the issues that they all are facing.

We will get someone from Hospice out for WWE to talk about what it is they do, and how you can be prepared should you ever need them.

NURSING CARE

Do you want to go to a nursing home, or do you expect your family to care for you in their home? Have you talked about it?

What type of nursing home would you be willing to go to?

None of these issues or ideas will do you any good if no one knows about them.

You have to talk with your family, your doctor and the person you designate as your health care proxy.

Talk about what kinds of end of life medical treatments you want. Your Doctor can help you by answering any questions you have about certain treatments.

Once you've decided what it is you do or don't want, make your wishes known. Write them down! Put them on video tape!

YOU HAVE LOTS OF CHOICES --- But only if you make them known while you have the chance.

Do you want your body donated to science?
Or your organs donated to other needy persons?

And I could go on and on over the choices that we need to address – but we need to address them NOW while we are healthy and can think about them rationally.

FINANCIAL DECISIONS

Do you have a financial plan in place?

Last Wednesday, Richard Kitchell came to WWE to talk about some of the things that you need to ensure that your family will be taken care of.

Those might include Trusts and other types of instruments to protect your assets.

Most important, and the capstone of all those is a WILL.

A Will states how you want your assets to be distributed upon your death.

Do you want to leave part of your estate to the church? Or to your favorite college or charity?

If it is not written down, it probably won't happen.

One more thing that I want to include here, because it has large financial implications, and that is PLANNING YOUR FUNERAL

Did you realize that the average cost of a funeral is about \$7,500, but many will go three times that high.

One of the things that happens when we refuse to deal with the issue of our death until it is upon us -- is our guilt drives up the amount of money that we spend on a funeral - money that we often do not have.

Have you talked about what you want in a funeral?

- The music you want played or sung.
- Who you want to speak
- Where you want to be buried
 - If you want to be buried at all

There is nothing worse than meeting with the family of a deceased loved one who have no idea what they want in the funeral service → other than being assured that their loved one is in heaven!

One of my philosophies is that every person deserves a decent burial regardless of their church affiliation.

As a result of that I share in about 10 funerals each year outside of our Ridge Church family. And more often than not, they have given no thought to a funeral!

But then again, neither have many of us.

A number of years ago I handed out a LIFE INVENTORY and encouraged you to fill it out and give the church a copy and keep a copy etc.

I want to try again → in the entry way this morning is a LIFE INVENTORY that I hope you will each fill out. We will print this on the web so that you can find it whenever you want too.

And once again, I encourage you to make a copy for us here at the church and let us keep it in our files so that we can assist your family when the time comes.

On Wednesday evening, Alice Kyle from Kish Funeral Home will be here to talk about what goes into pre-planning a funeral. I hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity.

The following week, Alissa Kohlhoff, an attorney will be here to talk about some of the legal options that you have to be prepared for the future.

And while getting the Medical and Financial issues all in order is important, I believe the most important thing that you need to get in order is your PERSONAL issues.

I am going to say very little here, but what I am going to say is important.

Please don't wait until you find out that you are dying before you go and seek reconciliation with . . . son/daughter/ parent / aunt / neighbor / friend etc.

Because if you wait until then --- too often it is too late.

Nothing breaks my heart more than seeing families torn apart because of some stupid petty argument.

And more often than not, that is just what it is.

Learn to live - as Tim McGraw says in his song → like you were dying.

I loved the movie, THE BUCKET LIST, but too much of it was about our own selfish desires.

Life is about relationships → and you never know what tomorrow is going to bring, so as a wise old sage named Paul once said: "do not let the sun go down on your anger."

Take the time in the coming days to rebuild some of the bridges that you have torn down in your life.

Someday, one day, people are going to gather together and talk about you and your life. What do you want them to say?

He was a self-centered person

He was indifferent to anyone

He was compassionate

He was full of love

He took the time to say "I'm sorry" - and he meant it!

Now is the time to deal with the things that we can change.