

Introduction

Learning about dying, types of loss, mourning, death and bereavement expanded my knowledge and understanding of my own experiences and better prepared me for supporting others in helpful ways as they process, respond and express emotions, behaviors and cognitions about loss and grief. This course caused me to think about my own living and dying. For the care and love of my family, I summarized some of my beliefs and insights about living and my requests and wishes prepared for my dying and death of earthly life.

My Insights on Living

I am grateful for being blessed in middle adulthood by health, marriage, motherhood, family, career and a renewed purpose in supporting wellbeing and healthy marriages and families. Reflecting about dying, requires taking stock of life through my decisions, choices, experiences. I hope my family feels loved by me forever, and my insights on living gives some encouragement to trust and follow all that is life-giving. Life is an amazing journey, and what sets a person apart is their character, particularly honesty, loyalty and integrity. So often we rush through life, rushing, hoping this stage will end, or so busy thinking about tomorrow that we hardly noticed today. I hope you pause, savor and enjoy all of it; yes even the good, the bad and the bittersweet are seeking to teach you some truth. Find joy for the journey. Life molds our character, and how we respond to the ups and downs is demonstrated by our morals and beliefs. Self-control, empathy, mercy and forgiveness are some of the most difficult to learn. Keep trying. Guard your hearts against being too self-focused or too self-defeating. They cause you to miss out on living. Appreciate the intricate details of this enormous tapestry of abundant life we have been given in nature, people, history and holy mystery.

Some pointers about young adulthood, a stage of life in your early 20's through your early 40's, crammed with life transitions and decisions likely to impact the direction of your life. It is a time of immense change, self-doubt and anxiety and a desire to differentiate and be independent and also be connected to your family and your roots. Between professional development, career, dating, marriage and family, friends and interests, this is a time of possibilities. It's also a time where your character will be tested. As Erik Erikson's psychosocial development model notes, these are the characteristic milestones and being clear about your values and morals and your hopes and dreams. Be cautious about balancing ambition and drive with caring about others and your health. Keep pride and ego or passivity and fear in check because they stunt your growth as a whole person. Pay attention to the state of your heart and soul. What are you doing that gives life? What are you doing that takes life?

Purpose and belonging are essential for living a long, full-filling life. Time has a way of helping us see clearly by looking backwards. Pay attention to work, people, subjects you enjoy. Give yourself goals and deadlines, folders for ideas, projects, spreadsheets for budgets and envision your life. Years ago, in our apartment after we were married, we joined a church and went to a workshop series that caused us to write our goals for our marriage and for each of us. It was one of the best gifts we ever received. Going all the way back to that time 34 years ago, that notebook has listed every goal we hoped to achieve. Not everything has come true, but the most important goals for living a fulfilling life have come true. What I urge today more than I knew then, is for decisions and choices about your life, please pray. Read and study the Bible, beginning with any book. Have a church family. Surround yourself with mature people of character who offer wisdom and advice, and seek nothing in return. In a week's time, go back to your written prayers, and write any new ideas, thoughts, solutions to problems, people, wisdom, knowledge or understanding that has come into your life. Try it. It works. God has a plan and purpose for you. I think the day you begin to seek His help to show you, and for help with all things, your life will be filled with abundance.

We are the summation of all of our choices and decisions. A baby forms attachment from birth to age 5, and poor attachment can have lifelong negative impact. Careers and money come and go. We are blessed by the honor to love and parent our children, and in a flash 5, 10, 25 years are gone. Whenever a decision or choice makes me unsettled or unclear, I recommend prayer. The less I lean on my own understanding and more on God, the more my life improves. My mistake in trying to make big life decisions for many years was going it alone, asking someone without my experience and never asking God. Be smart. Be aware. Protect your soul, heart, mind and body. Ask God. No one knows you like He does. Trust God. He reveals to you what is right for you. He seeks nothing from you but a relationship. Ask Him to guide you.

Being accountable for your health and growth as a whole person are essential. Nurture your spiritual, relational, emotional, behavioral, mental, physical, nutritional and cognitive well being. Guard your thinking, feeling, behaving and acting. Continue to learn about yourself. Find quiet each day to center yourself. Keep a list of gratitude for the people who love you, whom you love, the kindnesses done for you and the people who generously care about and for you. Make and keep mentors, friends, neighbors, colleagues, your managers. Make time to be together. Share a call, letter, card, email, gift. Read. Exercise. Play a sport. Eat lean protein and plants. Join a club. Remember birthdays and anniversaries. Be present with people. Genuinely care, connect and relate. And, above all you do in life, remember to love and to be loved.

How do you love well? Read the Bible daily, even just a chapter, and pray at least once a day. Die to as much sin as possible, to have a better life on earth. I believe through knowing God, he reveals to you the key to loving relationships, His purpose for your life. Prayer requires us to pause, reflect on our thinking, feeling, behaving and acting. Did I act in love? Did I feel loved? Read Corinthians, Proverbs or Galatians. Your knowledge, wisdom and understanding of love will be enriched.

My earliest vision for my life purpose brings memories of playing house, school, grocery store with my sister, and me role playing the mother, teacher or checkout clerk. My vision for life purpose was to fall in love, marry and be a mother. An adolescent in the 1980's, I added to my life vision a college degree and a career. I planned to marry at 30 and become a mother at 35. Then, I fell in love. I highly recommend it! I married at 22 and became a mother at 30. Please fall in love and experience the special bond of life-lasting marriage. My wedding day is still the best day of my life. Falling in love and getting married is the best decision of my life. My prayer is that my family experience love, marriage and growth the blessings of children bring to parents. God's design for life gives hope, love, peace and joy.

My End of Life

Reflecting to prepare my family for my earthly end of life helped me see how God blesses us. Our experiences with loss and death are few as our families of origin and our extended families are small. Because our family of origin moved almost 4 decades ago from our home state, we know the few that do live. My paternal grandfather's preparations for his death in Michigan in 2008 are similar to my wishes.

My request is for our Pastor Kent to preside over my funeral service at St. Luke's and both Pastor James from Grace Chapel and Kent share the sermon, and my pinewood coffin will be placed at the altar before the church service begins. Afterwards, I want a graveside burial, private for family. I hope there's music, photos, flowers and a reception at St. Luke's immediately following the service.

My request is for my family to support one another with compassion, patience, expressed emotions, listening and their presence. I want my family to know they may experience feelings of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and eventually acceptance. Losing or gaining noticeable amounts of weight, sleeping too little or too much, isolation or extreme overwork and/or substance abuse are signals for help. Turn to one another. Seek counseling. Go to support groups. Reach out to our pastors, our church, family, colleagues and friends. It is normal to get support; it is typical to feel like you are in a fugue. Please accept any kindness and support you receive. Do not turn people away, saying you are strong. Pay attention to who is there for you in the dark hours. They are your true brothers and sisters.

Several years ago, all the legal documents pertaining to a will, health care directive, durable power of attorney for healthcare decisions and another for financial decisions are complete as well as their location and other details we last discussed in 2020. My living will states I do not wish to have life-sustaining support, nor do I wish to be resuscitated in the event of an unlikely recovery to a fully functioning life. I do not approve the use of euthanasia. I retain my right to discontinue medical treatment. My biggest wish is my dying does not bring prolonged strain, burden, stress or sadness for any of my loved ones.

Conclusion

Thinking and talking about loss, dying and death is uncomfortable. Messy feelings of anxiety, tension and regret may come to the surface. Emotions of worry, unfinished business, dreams and plans that will come to pass is the hardest part about loss and grief. My prayer is that every member of my family's faith in the Holy Triune God grows and they always find with one another in unity, comfort and clarity in living and dying. Please hold on to the belief that the end of this earthly life leads to our everlasting life and we will be reunited.