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A New Series on Aging, Dying, and Death Elizabeth Turnage

Hi Friends,

Today begins a new monthly series on aging, dying, and death. Please don't click away. Did you know that the fastest growing age group in America right now is 85 and older, and the "current growth of...65 and over is unprecedented" (PRB.org)? Even if we are not aging, dying, or dead, we need to recognize the inevitable reality. And if we are, especially if we are Christians, there is much to be gained and little to be lost by knowing the hope of the gospel for this season of life. I hope you will walk this journey with me. I hope you will share your stories, your thoughts, your questions, your prayers. Please feel free to email me using the contact form or by commenting below. I promise I will get back to you.

Why We Don't Talk about It

I don't mean to be morbid, but I'm dying. I don't mean to be offensive, but so are you. Despite a myriad of life-prolonging advances in modern medicine, the mortality rate remains at 100%. If I continue to live, I will get old (something our world may consider worse than dying), and if I don't, well then, I will die.

Despite the certainty of death, it seems no one really wants to talk about it. Just last month, I had the privilege of taking part in a well-designed and lovingly-executed conference on The Practical Theology of Death and Dying. (My part was to offer a workshop for caregivers.) At this vibrant church known for its well-attended events designed to help people apply the gospel to daily life, the attendance was, unsurprisingly, lower than usual.

We don't really have to wonder why. At some level, it's obvious. It's morbid (a word that did not used to carry the negative connotation it now does) to talk about death. In our anti-aging society, the subject has become taboo. We can watch traumatic deaths on cable news or bizarre deaths on crime shows, but we can't talk about the realities of aging, dying, and death.

Why Christians Can Talk about It

And yet, as Christians, the cultural narrative doesn't, or shouldn't, define us. We might well ask why Christians are so reticent to discuss the issues of aging, dying, and death. The Bible doesn't shy away from talking about death. Christians in previous centuries were intentional about preparing for death: pastors preached sermons on death, and tracts were written to help people with the "art of dying" (ars moriendi).

In his eloquent liturgy that opens his book [*Every Moment Holy, Volume II: Death, Grief, and Hope*](#) ([affiliate link](#)), Douglas McKelvey articulates a warm invitation to speak of death, dying, grief, and hope:



“Children of the Living God,
Let us now speak of dying,
and let us speak without fear,
for we have already died with Christ,
and our lives are not our own.
Our dying is part of the story
that God is telling to us,
and part of the story
God is telling *through* us....
Death will not have the final word,
so we need not fear to speak of it.
Death is not a period that ends a sentence.
It is but a comma,
a brief pause before the fuller thought
unfolds into eternal life.

Douglas McKelvey, “An Exhortation Making Space to Speak of Dying.”

McKelvey is right—we *can* talk about death and dying. We *can* talk about aging. We can face the hard and bitter realities—dying sucks the life out of us and aging subjects us to previously unimagined levels of indignity—because God is telling a story of hope to us and through us as we age and die. Aging and dying, while they can bring new levels of indignity and humiliation, can also bring new levels of surrender and growth, not to mention the perspective and wisdom to bless both the dying and the living. When we not only talk about aging and dying and death but face it intentionally and prepare for it, we can know deeper joy, peace, and hope. Next month, we will discuss the benefits of discussing and preparing for aging, dying, and death. For today, I’ll leave you with a few reflection or discussion questions. I’d love to hear your thoughts on these or anything else that comes to mind about these hard topics:

For Reflection:

1. How do you feel about discussing aging, dying, and death?
2. Have you known anyone who prepared well for their death? How did that bless you? Conversely, have you known or observed someone who did not prepare well? How did that affect their loved ones?

For A Prayer about Discussing Aging, Dying, and Death, [go here](#).