



Seven things I learnt about Dying Well from the June conference

Our June 2017 conference was a deeply emotional, but very engaging and practical two days where we were able to openly and sensitively discuss the many aspects of how to support people to die well, and to live well until they die. There was lots to take in and mull over and here are 7 take home learnings that I will allow to shape my support of people who are dying:

1. Four things every person needs to hear while they are alive and especially when they are dying

The Bible speaks a lot about all four of these points!

- “I love you”
- “Thankyou”
- “I’m sorry – will you forgive me?” & “I forgive you”
- “Good bye” - which literally means ‘God be with you’

If possible facilitate conversations where the dying person and their family hear these things. Reconciliation is important and good palliative care gives people time to achieve this.

2. **Good palliative care can help to facilitate a good death** because it ‘affirms life, and regards dying as a normal process, neither hastening nor postponing death, but providing relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, and where possible it enable people to die in their place of choice’.

- A great place to commence the palliative care discussion is by asking Dr Harvey Chochinov’s ‘Dignity Question’ which is, “Tell me one thing/the most important thing about yourself that can help me to care for you?”
- “You matter because you are you, and you matter to the last day of your life. We will do everything we can to help you die peacefully and let you live until your die” Dame Cecily Saunders
- www.caringbridge.org enables people to make an ad-free website to communicate with their wider network about their health journey. It stops you having to field lots of phone calls repeating progress and it pulls all the messages together so you have memory book at the end



3. God understands our suffering.

- Jesus experienced suffering right to his death. God did not spare Jesus, his son, from suffering. Through Jesus, God carried the burdens that crush us. God was not a spectator, he experienced the pain and grief of losing his son. He is acquainted with sorrow, so we can lean into God in the knowledge that he understands, he is compassionate and he provides comfort .
- You do not 'get over' the loss of a loved one, rather the pain and the suffering of grief are absorbed into one's life until they becomes a part of who we are. Choosing to experience grief and learn from it, allowing it to shape our new identity in life giving ways is a choice, a darned difficult one, but loving self and experiencing the love of others heals and transforms us to a new way of being and a new way of living.

4. Compassion is an essential quality for supporting the dying person and their family.

- Compassion means to join in one's suffering, therefore it involves deep feeling, that is accompanied by thoughtful and appropriate action.
- It is demonstrated in the story of the Good Samaritan where the Samaritan helped the dying man in an approach that was holistic and practical. It involved his time, his money, his knowledge, his empathy, His strength, and his care.
- Compassion is what Jesus wants us to provide – our whole person walking alongside and ministering to the holistic needs of the other person

5. It is important to enable people to 'tell their story'

Some enabling questions include:

- What are cherished times for you?
- What are you most proud of?
- If someone were to make a movie of your life what and who would it include?
- Are you at peace?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- When do you feel most alive?

6. Churches can open their doors and Christians can open their hearts in various practical ways to facilitate a good death

- Asking the carer "Do you need a break?" is a great place to start and then providing what they need to get that break should follow!
- It was inspiring to hear how Anne Ranse and her team in Canberra have a combination of salaried faith community nurse and community volunteers who give their time and talents to provide meals activities and support at their 'Day with a Difference' - day hospice. This is a



replicable model that other churches could follow. Anne is happy to discuss more and show you through her ministry. Contact her at nurse@holycovenant.org.au & visit their website <http://www.holycovenant.org.au>

- The power of company and the value of prayer
- Enable the person to stay in control and respect their wishes
- Be a family to those who have no family
- Allow children and grandchildren to participate actively
- Listen well and talk less, but do discuss the difficult topics when they come up
- If you are an employer, allow the carer flexible working conditions

7. 'Grief wounds, love heals'.

Gillies Ambler provided 7 lessons:

- Surround grief with love: grief is facilitated by opening your heart to love again where "Love is the will to nurture yourself [in your surroundings] as you nurture others [in theirs]."
- Ask the questions even when they are scary
- Convey your experience – through any form of creative expression letter, music, art, poetry, scripture, dance...
- Know grief's modus operandi – the loss of identity, personhood, hope...
- Create a centre of hospitality – provide compassionate care to self and others
- Find meaning in the new normal – allow yourself to dream again and let others in to encourage you
- Be willing to learn from your experience

From Anne van Loon