



THE LUTHERAN HOME
ASSOCIATION

CONTACT

337 S. Meridian Street
Belle Plaine, Minnesota
info@tlha.org | tlha.org
888-600-TLHA

Grace-full Passing

Support for God's children as they near heaven



Devotions + Journal
Volume 1

Jesus said...“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

Dear Child of God,

Although we strive to be with you as much as possible, there might be times as your earthly journey draws to a close that you would like a private moment of devotion or contemplation. This booklet offers you additional support, encouragement, and hope at times when your chaplain is unavailable or you want a few moments of quiet contemplation.

After each devotion is a page to journal your thoughts. This is a safe and judgement-free place to explore your jumbled thoughts and feelings, remember your loved ones, or record your ongoing journey through grief. Sometimes it can be comforting to look back and see how far you've come over time.

Most of all, be assured that you can find your comfort in God and in his grace. God will be with you to the end and will take you to your eternal home in heaven.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

We pray that this booklet will reassure you in your faith for a graceful passing.

Your Brothers in Christ,
The Lutheran Home Association chaplains

LORD, HOW COULD YOU?

When Jesus saw her weeping, . . . he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. (John 11:33)

He was angry—so angry that he didn’t even want to talk. He had been successful in his business, happy with his family, and active in his church. He had also been hit with a virulent and fatal form of cancer. The pastor, after unsuccessful attempts at small talk, wisely urged, “Come on, John, spit it out.” And out it came. All of the man’s frustration and anger. Why had it happened to him? How could the Lord do this when he still had so much to live for? How unfair could it be?

Regardless of our age, dying incites anger within us. Death robs us of family and friends, strips away our memories and dreams, and threatens us with the end of all we hold precious. Who wouldn’t be angry to be caught so helplessly in death’s trap? Perhaps even angry enough to shake our fists at God and accuse him of making a mistake or, at best, of not dealing fairly.

Death made Jesus angry too. As he stood before Lazarus’ grave, witnessing Martha’s and Mary’s grief, Jesus was visibly distressed. Using a word that indicates anger, the sacred record states, “*he was deeply moved in spirit.*” It also says he was “troubled,” indicating agitation. Seldom in Scripture’s record does the Savior show such deep emotions. But here in the midst of death’s sad scene, he shows his anger over what sin has done to mankind. Physical death is the tragic result of sin. It brings the worst kind of sorrow and suffering with it.

So spit it out! Lash out at the suffering and separation that death brings. Such venting is normal for God’s children. It isn’t sinful. Don’t be surprised, however, if you also find yourself lashing out with accusations against God. If we were super Christians, those accusing words, “How could you, Lord?” wouldn’t rise from our lips. But since we are weak, they come. And when they do, we need to look again at our Savior Jesus.

Not only was he angry with sin’s wages—namely, death—in divine love he did something about it. He raised his friend Lazarus to show that death was not the victor. If death is sin’s wage, then life is sin’s defeat. The Savior died our death and filled our grave to pay the penalty for all our sins, including our angry outbursts and anxious doubts. On Easter Sunday he rose again to show that death for us is not a tragic end but the glorious entrance into an eternal existence at his side. May that certain hope answer our questions and ease our anxieties.

Prayer: *Lord, assure me through your Word that you hear and understand. Forgive me when I sin in anger, and comfort me with the sure hope of life in heaven with you. Grant this for your love’s sake. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, CAN WE MAKE A DEAL?

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)

What a pillar of faith and strength she was. Whenever her pastor visited, he was comforted by her trust in God's promises. In the face of impending death, she looked with confidence to the one who is the Resurrection and the Life. Then one day as their visit ended, she finally opened up. "If only the Lord would let me live long enough to see my last child married," she said wistfully. "Then I could die in peace."

In the face of death, it isn't unusual for believers to try to bargain with God. "If only God lets me live, I will do such and such with my life." "If only I could have a few more years, Lord, I would use them for you." "If only you delay my death, I will change this and that." Often the bargain-ing is sincere. Sometimes God even seems to accept the deal, and believers carry through on their promises. But often such bargaining is simply an attempt to delay the inevitable and to deny the unstoppable.

The psalmist didn't pray for an extension of life but for the right understanding of life. He wanted the Lord to teach him to number his days correctly and to view life as the time of preparation for heaven through Jesus. How long our time of grace extends is in the Lord's wise hands. What is done with that time of grace is in our hands. When death draws near, God's children can pray about tomorrow. But we always leave the decision about the length of our lives in the Lord's hands. We are better off applying our hearts to wisdom today. We are better off using our remaining hours to grasp the best bargain the world has ever seen, the gift of eternal life a gracious God has freely prepared for us in the Savior Jesus Christ. Clutching that bargain, we're ready for death whenever it comes.

Prayer: *Lord, you know the desires of my heart. You also know what is best for me and what is the best time for my departure. Teach me to trust you and to be satisfied with the number of days you grant me. In the days I have left, draw me closer to my Savior, the source of eternal life. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit ttha.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, WHY HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ME?

I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?" (Psalm 42:9)

I can still see the expression on our little son's face. While attending the state fair, we had stopped beside the long slide that people speed down on gunny sacks. It was a new attraction in those days. When we turned to go on, our son headed into the dense crowd in the opposite direction. All at once we realized that he wasn't with us, and we went scrambling for him. "Lost," that look on his little face said. "Forgotten."

People who are facing death know that feeling. Sometimes as they confront life's severest problem, even believers can't help thinking, "What's the use? Nothing seems to make any difference. Who cares?" They may not always say it, but sooner or later they think it. Even the strongest believers have days when they see only darkness and no stars—days when death seems to be only a dead end on life's road instead of the on-ramp to heaven's highway. So they clam up, silently turning their backs on loved ones and even on their God. Like the psalmist, they cry out in despair to their God, "Why have you forgotten me?"

"Forgotten me?" How could God ever do that? There he hangs on Calvary's cross, because he remembers me and dearly cares for me. There he sheds his precious blood for me that my sins might be forgiven. There he gives his life for me that I might share his life in heaven. He will not leave me helpless or hopeless, not even in the face of life's greatest problem. Underneath me at the moment of death will be his everlasting arms, to cradle me and carry me safely home.

When impending death pulls us into the pit of depression, doctors may help by prescribing medicine. But only Jesus, the rock of our salvation, can revive the flagging spirits of our souls and raise our eyes of faith to heaven's shores.

Prayer: *Lord, I know you understand when I feel down and depressed. Don't leave me alone in this wilderness, but rescue me by assuring me of your saving love. Let your Holy Word and Holy Supper revive my sinking spirits and ready me for my departure. This I ask for your love's sake. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit ttha.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT IT?

Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you." (Genesis 48:21)

"So what are you really thinking?" asked the pastor. He had just finished his devotion at the bedside of a believer who was terminally ill. Silence had hung in the air for a while. Then the pastor wisely asked his question. With a little prodding the dying Christian opened up, and her concerns came tumbling out.

How hard it is to talk about dying! Some doctors don't like to use the word. Instead, they find sugar-coated substitutes. As death draws near, their brief daily calls to the patient's room become even briefer. Relatives and friends don't like to talk about death either. When they run out of things to say about the weather or current events, they sit in silence or find a reason to leave. If a dying loved one should even bring up the subject, they try to shush him up. And the dying person? For him the subject can be difficult too. But so necessary!

What better remedy is there for our fears about death than to speak about them with believers who love us? The talk, but the discussion is necessary, both for those who talk and those who listen. And what better preacher is there than a dying believer?

Jacob, whose other name was Israel, knew this. He spoke plainly to his beloved son Joseph. "I am about to die," he said, stating a fact both of them already knew. "But God will be with you," he went on, stressing another fact that Joseph also needed to know. Father and son could talk about death—and both would benefit. The father could also talk to his son about the one who would remain with him, namely, the Lord, whose promises are new every morning.

Eloquent are the words a dying believer speaks about his hope in the Lord.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for talking to me about death and life. Without your words, I would be lost and hopeless at a time like this. Help me now speak about death and life with my loved ones. I need their comfort and assurance, and they need my openness. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, IS IT ALL RIGHT TO CRY?

Jesus wept. (John 11:35)

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17)

“I just can’t help it,” the burly lawman apologized.

When his pastor took his hand in that hospital room, the patient had burst into tears. Exploratory surgery had uncovered the worst kind of news. The malignancy had spread throughout his body. Surgery wouldn’t help; the future was bleak. The believer who was so used to being in charge was now helpless.

Jesus wept too, for a different reason. At the grave of his dear friend Lazarus, the Savior burst into tears. Like a tornado, death had swept through Bethany, leaving in its aftermath a lifeless body and survivors filled with overwhelming sorrow and helplessness. When the God-man Jesus saw the ravages of death that day, his eyes flooded over. But his tears were not tears of helplessness.

The lawman’s tears didn’t need to be either. “Go ahead and cry,” the pastor told that lawman. “You’re in good company. Jesus cried too. He knows what you’re feeling.” Then the pastor told him about Jesus’ other tears, the ones only the Savior could shed. In the shadows of Gethsemane, Jesus wept heavy tears because of the load his Father had asked him to carry. The sins of the world were on his shoulders. Their payment would pin him to that cruel cross and plunge him into the pains of hell. But when it was all done, he could declare, “It is finished.” Sin was paid for. Death had been defeated. Because of Jesus, our tears in the face of death are no longer a sign of helplessness. Rather, they show how human we are and how real death is.

So go ahead and cry. Death, the horrible wages of sin, brings tears to our eyes. But don’t let the tears blur your view of the blessed scene awaiting you in heaven. There his hands, once pierced with nails, will be the soft tissue to wipe away the last trace of your tears.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for showing me that it’s all right to cry. Give me strength so that my tears are never bitter or hopeless tears but, rather, tears that express my pain and anguish. Help me see through these tears so that I can recognize your salvation and the beautiful scene that awaits me in heaven. There I shall weep no more. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit ttha.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, REMIND ME OF WHO I AM

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

When the world tumbles in around us, it’s easy to forget who we are. “Pastor, sometimes I feel like I’m just another blob, just some nameless, faceless entity in this huge world,” said a shut-in who was not long for this world. It’s true that the Lord has more than six billion others to take care of. Humanly speaking, he must be more than busy, mopping up the spills sinners cause and keeping the complex universe spinning smoothly. Could it be that he forgets or doesn’t have time for us, especially in the hour of need?

Let’s ask him. After all, we need to hear it from his own lips. “Don’t worry,” he says. “I have redeemed you. I’ve bought and paid for you with the most precious thing I have, the blood of my own Son. I put the sign of his redeeming cross on you at your baptism, telling the devil that now you belong to me. I’m not about to toss you aside now as though you were no longer of any value to me.”

“Don’t worry,” he says further. “I have summoned you by name.” In this world we may be no more than a number. Social security numbers, zip code numbers, hospital identification numbers—that’s how people refer to us. But our God calls us by name. Think about what that means. We are not just nameless, faceless children to him. We are children he knows by name—each one of us. He knows our heartaches and heartbreaks, our tears and trials, our conditions and needs. He knows how much our shoulders can carry. He knows when and how to strengthen our shoulders under a cross—and when and how to remove that cross, lest we stumble under its weight. He also knows the manner and time of death that is good for each one of us, and he carries out his plan accordingly.

“You are mine,” he concludes. When the almighty God says, “You are mine,” that lasts forever. Each of his children is covered with his Son’s blood. Each is a precious jewel that will shine in his heavenly crown. Each is guaranteed safe handling until it is time to stand with his heavenly family.

Let’s not forget, though, God doesn’t make such promises because of who and what we are. Sinners deserve nothing from him except punishment. Such precious promises come only because of who and what God is. He is a God whose love is undeserved and unending, a God who not only made us precious through the Savior but deals with us accordingly— even in the time of dying and at the hour of death.

Prayer: *Lord, do you still remember me? Do you still care for me? Please forgive me when I wonder in my weakness. Draw me back to your Son’s cross to see how much you love me. Assure me that your love never changes but always covers me, even in the hour of death. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, I CAN'T, BUT YOU CAN

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. (Psalm 130:1,2)*

Only a few wheezing words, that's all he could muster. Lying in the veteran's hospital—this would be the last time—he was hooked up to several machines. Lungs, ruined during World War II, wouldn't make it much longer. "Pastor, I can't pray," his lips formed the words. He was not only incapable of getting the words out, but his mind and body were too exhausted to concentrate on prayer.

"You don't need words," the pastor replied. "Just whisper in your heart. All you need to say is 'Lord, I can't, but you can.'" In our verse the unnamed psalmist said the same thing, though with different words. Could it be that the Lord didn't record the name of the psalmist because he wants us to make these words our own? Each of us has been plunged into his or her own depths. What problem can be deeper than a sickbed and impending death? Only those who are hooked up to machines and are nearing the end know how deep that hole can be. Only those whose strength fails and whose lips can no longer form the words know how helpless they feel and how powerless they are even to pray.

For those in the depths of suffering, there is no better prayer than "Lord, I can't, but you can." Lord, I can't do anything to relieve my heavy pain, restore my failing strength, or ready myself for the dark road ahead. Lord, I can't do anything to make life last another second, even if I wanted to. Lord, I can't do anything to erase my worries about what will happen to the loved ones I leave behind. And Lord, I can't do anything to ease my fears as death's fist knocks insistently on life's door.

"But you can, Lord." That's the answer I need. You have already pulled me up from the pit of my sins by plunging your own Son into hell's pains for me. You have already cleansed me with his precious blood and clothed me with his robe of righteousness. Your love has done what I can't do—it has written my name in your book of life in heaven. And it has promised to let nothing, not even my death, erase that entry.

Now, Lord, please hear my voice, even when I can't form the words. Please assure me that your mercy covers me, both soul and body, and that it always will.

Prayer: *Lord, I'm so tired, so weary, so helpless. You know how I feel and what I need. Through your Word show me again what you have done for me in Jesus. Let my salvation, worked by your love, assure me that you can handle everything else in my life, even the journey at the end of my life. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tlha.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, CHANGE ME FROM AFRAID TO APPREHENSIVE

Jesus answered, "I am the way. . . . No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

"I'm afraid. There, I finally said it. I'm afraid." It took some courage for the patient to admit this to her pastor. It also took confidence that he wouldn't scold her but would understand. Usually we cry into our pillows in the dark when no one can hear us. We keep that stiff upper lip so others won't think ill of us. But in trying to hide our fear, we only encourage it to deepen its shadows.

Taking her hand, the pastor asked, "Are you afraid of death or are you apprehensive?" Then he went on to explain. As children, when we first attempted to ride a bicycle, it wasn't with fear but with apprehension. We wanted to ride but didn't know how. When we were teenagers, we went on our first dates. We were jittery, not because we were afraid, but because we hadn't done that before. On our wedding days, it wasn't fear but apprehension that made us nervous. Would our love be lifelong? How could we know without trying? When the first baby was on the way, it was the same thing—not fear but apprehension because of the unknown.

The patient was nodding in agreement. "So it is with death," the pastor continued. "It's a brand-new experience for us. We have never walked that way before. No one has ever returned to tell us how it goes. Of course we're apprehensive. Of course we have all sorts of questions, all sorts of thoughts. And there's nothing wrong with them."

Then the pastor pointed her to the answers for her questions. Though God's children don't know what death will be like or how they will face it, they do know two important truths. They know that death leads to heaven. And they know that Jesus is the only way there. The Savior himself has told us, so we know it is true. "I am the way," he said. He not only shows or leads us on the way. He is the way. He is the road our feet of faith must travel if we want to reach heaven. He also has told us where he leads—to the Father. That's what heaven really is—being forever with the Father, who made us and redeemed us. To be eternally safe in his house, secure in his family, serving him without sin, that's what heaven is. Though we don't know what death will be like, by God's grace we do know where it will take us and how to get there.

Prayer: *Lord, I've talked to you about my concerns. I've carried my anxious questions to you. Show me the answers I need so that I won't be overcome with fear. Show me my Savior's loving face and his promise of your eternal home. Help me be brave enough to talk about my concerns also with those near and dear to me. I need their encouragement, and they need your answers too. In the name of Jesus, who is the way to heaven, I ask this. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, HELP ME MEND THE FENCES

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)*

Ramón was so glad his son had arrived in time. Years before, he and his son had had a falling out as they tried to run a business together. Money can do that to people. So can a sharp tongue that so quickly wounds and a thin skin that is so easily scratched. For years they had barely spoken to each other. Then Ramón had learned he was dying. He knew he needed to see his son. “Call him,” he had begged his wife. “I just have to mend fences with him before I die.”

Any time in life is a good time to forgive whatever grievances we may have against one another. Our Savior commanded his loving followers to do that. And our loving Savior did that and still does that for us each day. What if we had to die with all our sins still piled up before us? What if our closing eyes saw only righteous anger on the face of God? Thank God for his full and free forgiveness on which to pillow our hearts when death’s day comes.

But the business of forgiving can be so difficult at times. How deeply we may have been hurt or may have hurt someone else! How fresh the wounds we may have inflicted on others or others may have inflicted on us. How hard it is to speak the words “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you”! So we journey on, trying to forget the gaps in the fences of life, leaving them un-mended. Even when death approaches, we have a hard time backing up to those broken fences and doing something about them. But we miss something extremely important if we don’t.

Ramón and his son had time together. With some difficulty they began to talk about what each had done. They ended up in tears, arms wrapped around each other, expressing love and forgiveness. Later that day they received the Lord’s body and blood in his Holy Supper for the assurance of their forgiveness. The pastor saw the joy they shared.

Do you have any fences to mend? Now’s the time—while there still is time. Reach up to the Savior for his rich forgiveness. Then reach out with forgiveness to one another.

Prayer: *Lord, I don’t know how you do it, how you can forgive me sin after sin, day after day. But I’m so glad you do. Without your forgiveness, I cannot die in peace. But, Lord, I don’t know how I can forgive those with whom I’ve had problems. Help me, Lord, to feel your forgiveness more richly so that I can forgive others more readily. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit t1ha.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, TELL ME AGAIN AND AGAIN THAT YOU LOVE ME

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38,39)

Can you even imagine a hospital room without love? Dying with no loved ones at your side? No loved ones with whom you can reminisce and to whom you can give last reminders? No loved ones from whom you can draw comfort—from their words and from their presence at your side? No loved ones to buoy you up when the waves grow steeper?

Then imagine dying without the one who loves us the most. About his love there can be no doubt. He's already proved it by placing his own Son into our skin, under our sins, and through hell's suffering. With a love we'll never fully understand, even if we live to be two hundred, our God has prepared salvation for us and provided a life that never ends. No wonder the Bible uses a special word for his love. In the original language spoken by Jesus and the apostles, the word refers to a love that is completely undeserved. It's a love that loves the unlovable, a love that doesn't depend on us but depends totally on him.

As Paul describes God's wondrous love in Christ, he assures us that nothing can separate us from that love. The devil would like to use death like a crowbar to pry us loose from God. He whispers in our ears that God is too far away and that his love is too feeble to hold us during that last dark hour. And sometimes we nod our heads in agreement. Or we are tempted to forget that the glue which holds us tightly to God comes from him, not from us.

So, please, Lord, tell me again and again of your great love for me in Christ. I can't die in peace without your love. Point me to those "love" passages in your Holy Word that assure me that you forgive me when I sin, seek me when I stray, hold me when I'm weak, and that you will receive me into glory when I die. Let these words I learned in childhood be my prayer and my confidence: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the loved ones you have placed at my side. Their presence and comforting words mean so much to me. Even more, Lord, thank you for the love that causes you to hold me. Don't let the pains of my last hours rip me loose from Jesus. Keep me ever close to him, and assure me that you love me and that you will bring me safely home to heaven. Amen.

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, KEEP ME HOPING

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you. (1 Peter 1:3,4)

Hope is essential in life—especially in times of sickness. No matter how uncertain the future or how disappointing the predicted outcome may be, doctors still try to hold out hope. Without hope there is little spirit for the fight, little energy to endure. Doctors also remember that they have miscalculated in the past and that hope can prove their predictions wrong.

But what happens when there is no more hope? When all the medications have been tried with-out success? When surgery cannot stop cancer’s insidious growth? When the damage caused by an accident cannot be repaired? When the heart muscles cannot be rejuvenated? What then? The pastor followed the doctor into Tonya’s room. Just an hour earlier, her physician had told her the “bad” news. Nothing more could be done. It was just a matter of time. Her family had gathered around her, but everyone had trouble finding words to speak. There didn’t seem to be any hope in that hospital room.

Or was there? The pastor read Peter’s inspired words about the “living hope” our God has prepared for us through his Son’s death and resurrection. As he read, hope’s light shone again in that room. He read about the heavenly inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, and hope’s light shone even brighter. Earthly hopes pop up for a while, then just as quickly fade away. Our lives endure for a bit, but they eventually expire. One by one our earthly hopes disappear or are taken from us. But the hope a loving God has given us in Christ lasts forever. Not even death can rob the believer of the hope kept in heaven for us. Of this living hope we can never hear too much. Its sure message gives us guidance in life and a guarantee in death.

Prayer: *Lord, helper of the helpless and hope of the hopeless, shine in my heart with the promises of my inheritance in heaven. I cannot go on without the hope those promises give. Please forgive me when that hope fades and I begin to give up. Please let your Word light the way, so that I can walk forward with eternal hope. Strengthen me with the conviction that whether I live or die, I belong to you. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, CAN I HEAR YOUR ASSURANCE AGAIN?

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

“Will you please close the door?” Adeline asked her pastor. Both knew death was near. She had obviously been listening as he brought the sweet news of forgiveness and certain victory over death through the Savior. But there was something more. And in that private room, she opened her heart, confessing the youthful sin by which she had shattered her marriage. For years guilt had kept her away from church. Even after she came back, that sin rubbed her conscience sore and rattled like some scary skeleton in her heart. Now she needed to know. Had God forgiven her? Could she die in peace? Or would she have to carry that sin before his judgment throne?

How accurate are the devil’s files in which he records our sins! How adept he is at dipping into those files at just the right time and drawing out just the right one in order to accuse us! As death draws closer, so does the old evil foe. “You think God wants you,” he whispers. “You and I both remember what you have done. Don’t you think he remembers too?” Each sin is serious in the eyes of our holy God.

Each sin earns the fires of hell as its wage. But some sins etch our memories more deeply and emerge to trouble our hearts more energetically. Adeline had her own. So does each of us. How we need the assurance God gave Israel through his prophet Micah—even more so on our deathbeds! Forgiveness is real, as if God has stomped those sins into dust so that they can no longer rise to haunt us. Forgiveness is real, as if God has submerged our sins in the deepest part of the sea so they can never be found or remembered again. His forgiveness is real because the payment was real. Through his Son’s death on the cross, he paid for all of our sins, including those that especially trouble us. Will he now raise these sins up from the dust or reach down for them in the depths of the sea? Jesus’ payment for our sins makes that not only unnecessary but impossible.

“Adeline,” the pastor said, “remember, when Jesus said ‘It is finished,’ he meant also the payment for the sin that is troubling you. And, Adeline,” he continued, “remember that when God plunges our sins into the depths of the sea, he also puts up a sign telling us, ‘No fishing allowed.’”

Prayer: *Lord, you’ve told me again and again through my baptism, through your Word, and through the Holy Supper that you have forgiven me. But, Lord, I need to hear again that your forgiveness covers that “special” sin that troubles me. I need to be assured, in this last hour, that your Son’s blood has washed my iniquity from me. Hold his atoning cross even more closely before my closing eyes. Shout his victorious claim, “It is finished,” even more loudly into my fading ears. Help me die at peace with you and with myself. For his love’s sake, I ask this. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, WHAT'S IT LIKE ON THE OTHER SIDE?

"They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3,4)

"Tell me about heaven," the dying Christian asked. Ready to leave this world, robed in her Savior's blood and righteousness, she wanted a preview of the place where she was going. In response, her pastor read the words of our verse. Like a travel brochure, those words depict an inviting picture of a beautiful place. Unlike some travel brochures, the words are not a flowery exaggeration or misleading traveler's tale.

What's it like on the other side, that better side of life we call heaven? "No more pain," John answers. On this earth we so often wrestle with and grow weary under a burden of pain. So often, particularly near the end, life seems to be one painful step after the other. "No more death," he also says. We've been waiting for the day when "heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee." "No more crying," he adds. No more tears inside our torn hearts or outside on our pillows because of the bumps and bruises of life.

"For the old order of things has passed away," John explains. "No more sin," he is really saying. When sin entered the world, it carried a suitcase filled with pain, death, and sorrow. When the saints stand before God, washed in the blood of the Lamb, not only sin but all its baggage will be absent. Moreover, we will be his people and he will be our God. Heaven's photo, if one were taken, would show us standing right next to God. He would be looking down at us with a smile, and we would be beaming up at him with the unmistakable look of love. Heaven will be a step-by-step walk with God, in contrast to the straying course we often take here on earth. In heaven we will see his loving face, in contrast to the weak images we now hold in our imaginations.

Just think, we will never be separated from him again. Imagine what it will be like to see, with both body and soul, the one who is loveliest to our eyes, dearest to our hearts, and most precious to our souls. Imagine what it will be like never again to have that glorious sight blurred by sin. Yes, tell me what it's like on the other side. More important, keep telling me about Jesus, the only way there.

Prayer: *Thank you, dear Savior, for dressing me for heaven with your righteousness. Comfort me and cheer me with the joyous sight that waits for me there. Cradle me in your arms, and carry me safely to that place in glory. I ask this for the sake of your mercy and love. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, WHY DON'T YOU TAKE ME?

I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. (Philippians 1:23)

“Please, pray that the Lord take me,” Emma pleaded. For her, the joys of life were long past. The days of bearing the cross of her incurable disease had been numerous and painful. “I won’t do that,” answered her pastor, “if you’re complaining about what God is sending and only impatiently wanting to get out from under it. But if you want the Lord to take you to heaven because you’re eager to taste the joys you’ll find there, we can pray that way.” So they prayed that way, and ended their prayer with the words “Not my will but yours be done.”

The apostle Paul penned a similar prayer for our use. His feet were still on this earth as he bore his heavy crosses. But his eyes were on heaven. Because he knew what was waiting for him in heaven, he could hardly wait to get there. His heart yearned to depart and enter the better life.

Notice how Paul talked about death. He didn’t call it the Grim Reaper, whose relentless scythe cuts us down. He didn’t label it the “king of terrors,” whose icy grip sends shivers down our spines. For him death meant to depart and be with Christ. It meant leaving the things that are temporary and torn by trouble to enjoy the treasures that are permanent and that come with peace. As a result, he viewed death as triumph rather than tragedy, as the beginning rather than the end. “Better by far” is the way he described that heavenly existence. “I desire to depart” is the way he expressed his yearning.

Christians yearn for heaven as little children yearn for Christmas. They know what is waiting for them at Jesus’ side. And they can hardly wait to experience those joys in full. On some days during our walk through life, that yearning is stronger than on others. As death approaches, the intensity of the yearning heats up. A prayer for God to take us to heaven is not wrong. What could be wrong with the desire to depart and be with Christ? What could be wrong with the desire to see the Savior’s face and to share his glory? What could be wrong with the desire to leave behind all the debris of this life and to live the sin-free, pain-free, death-free life with the Prince of life in heaven? Please take me home, Lord. Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.

Prayer: *Lord, you know the pains of my life and the anguish of my soul. You also know how eager I am to leave this world of tears and to come home to you in heaven. So please understand my prayer. Help me bear my cross and bow to your will—and to be ready to depart when you call. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



LORD, WALK WITH ME

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

Whether it's been sneaking up on me for days or has suddenly just appeared before me, death is at the door. The green pastures have turned into parched desert; the still waters into raging waves. In death, as never before, I need the assurance David offers so beautifully in his psalm. I need to know that the Shepherd walks with me.

Please, Lord, remind me that the valley lying before me is no longer filled with death—just its shadow. And like a shadow, death can only scare me, not scar me. My Shepherd protects me. On Calvary he walked through the actual valley of death. He took all the pains that sin had attached to death and abolished them forever. Because he paid for my sins, I don't have to stay in the valley. I can walk right through it. The shadows may be frightening, the fog dense, but behind the shadow there is always light. At the end of the valley, heaven's eternal light shines, waiting for me.

Please, Lord, remind me also that you didn't say, "Go ahead, start the journey. I'll be waiting for you at the other end of the valley." Instead, you promised, "I'll be with you. You won't be walking alone." Help me see that you are walking, not behind me, not even beside me, but ahead of me. You lead because you know the way. You've walked through this valley before.

The wounds that I see as you hold my hand assure me that your way is true. As you guide my steps over this somber path, your rod and staff give me comfort. What enemy can stand up against your power? Like the shepherd's rod that chases the wolves away, your power will keep the devil at bay. Like the shepherd's staff that pulls the sheep closer, your love will not let me stray. My journey through the dark valley will be safe. "You are with me."

When David spoke of the comfort he received from your rod and staff, he used a word that means to "breathe easily." When I see you leading me through the valley of the shadow of death, I can breathe easily because you are with me.

Prayer: *Lord, hear my prayer and walk with me. Amen.*

More support materials available online including a hymn playlist + devotion audio files.



Scan the QR code or
visit tla.org/griefsupport

Aim camera at code
to view additional
resources.



I will put my Spirit in you and you will live. (Ezekiel 37:14a)



THE LUTHERAN HOME
ASSOCIATION

Where the care of the soul is the soul of care.