

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life

Small Group Guide: “Dying Well”

(LifelongFaith Associates)

Preparation

- The following handouts are included with this session:
 1. *Remembering* (copy this handout on heavier stock paper if possible)
 2. *Your Bucket List: Developing a Life List*
 3. *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die*
- Ask each participant to bring photos of their deceased loved ones for a Wall of Remembrance. They can also bring flowers and candles (in glass) to remember their loved ones.
- Glue sticks
- Several Bibles

Video Options

- Use excerpts from the video of Randy Pausch’s *Last Lecture* during the session (on YouTube or at www.thelastlecture.com). On September 18, 2007, computer science professor Randy Pausch stepped in front of an audience of 400 people at Carnegie Mellon University to deliver a last lecture called “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams.” With slides of his CT scans beaming out to the audience, Randy told his audience about the cancer that was devouring his pancreas and that would claim his life in a matter of months. On the stage that day, Randy was youthful, energetic, handsome, often cheerfully, darkly funny. He seemed invincible. But this was a brief moment, as he himself acknowledged. Randy’s lecture has become a phenomenon, as has the book he wrote based on the same principles, celebrating the dreams we all strive to make realities. Randy lost his battle to pancreatic cancer on July 25th, 2008, but his legacy will continue to inspire us all, for generations to come.
- Use excerpts from *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die DVD* by Dr. John Izzo during the session. This presentation explores the things we all must discover before we die. Dr. John Izzo conducted 200 interviews with people aged 60-105 who were identified by others as having found wisdom. This series features Dr. John Izzo before a live audience exploring the five themes that emerged from those 200 interviews. Through compelling stories, humor and practical ideas for change, he explores the paths to contentment and purpose.
 1. “Reflect More: Living a Life of Intention”
 2. “Risk More: Living a Life of Courage & Adventure”
 3. “Love More: Living a Life of Kindness”
 4. “Enjoy More: Living a Life of Joy”
 5. “Return More: Living a Life of Significance”

(Production Company: One Life Productions Corp. and The Biography Channel)
Available from: Amazon.com and The Izzo Group (<http://www.theizzogroup.com>)

Small Group Plan

Part 1. Yearning: Stories of Dying Well

Read the introduction to the session (from page 4.2 in *Living Well*):

*Death is an inevitable part of life. There is not getting around it. This is a frightening prospect, for the specter of death destroys any illusion that we are in full control of our lives or that we are our own makers and keepers. Most of us will experience the death of someone we love dearly, and all of us must face our own death. How is it, then, that some people are able to die with the assurance that death is not the final word? How is it that some are able to face the death of a loved one trusting that love is stronger than death? (Amy Plantiga Pauw, *Practicing Our Faith*)*

Begin the session by reading or presenting the two opening stories, “Teaching Farewell” and “The Miracle of My Mother’s Easter Pies,” on pages 4.2–4.3 in *Living Well*. Use a different reader for each story.

Part 2. Reflecting

1. Remembering Loved Ones Who Have Died

Reflect on your experience of death and dying by remembering loved ones who have died.

If we think about those who died well, we usually find that they are also the ones who lived well. How we live our lives in the present moment says much about our attitudes towards death. Dying well is all about living well, as if each stage of our life were the last.

Using the handout, *Remembering*, recall the lives of loved ones you want to remember today. Complete the two questions on the handout and then attach the photo(s) to the handout. You will need one copy of the handout for each person you are remembering.

When you finish, post the photos of your deceased loved ones on the Wall of Remembrance. You can also place flowers and light candles to remember your loved ones.

Conclude by sharing your responses to the question: *What can we learn from our deceased loved ones about dying well and living well?*

2. Creating Your Own Bucket List

Read about the “Bucket List” concept on page 4.5 of *Living Well*.

Using the handout, *Your Bucket List: Developing a Life List*, create your own list:

Making a “Life List” and making sure it stays current is a pretty good tool for keeping life and career on course. Create your “Life List,” of the things you want to do and become while you are alive. Making a list for your career is also a good idea: What do you want to do and to become during your career? Once you have the list, build in a time to check in with yourself every 2-3 months: Does the list still make sense? What must be added? What has been accomplished? What will be your focus for the months ahead?

After everyone has completed their list, share items from your “bucket list” with the group.

Part 3. Exploring: The Christian Practice of Dying Well

The Exploring section of the “Dying Well” chapter on pages 4.7–4.10 in *Living Well* presents several key themes from the Scriptures about death and dying.

- 1) Dying Isn’t All There Is: Love is Stronger than Death
- 2) Grieving and Consoling
- 3) Giving Thanks and Remembering
- 4) Being Supported in the Christian Community
- 5) Dying to Self

1. Dying Isn’t All There Is: Love is Stronger than Death – The Story of Lazarus

Read the “Raising of Lazarus” in John 11:1-44 (or just the verses 17, 20-27, 32-36, 38-39, and 43-44 on page 4.7 in *Living Well*). Select a narrator to read the non-speaker parts of the Gospel story. Select people to role play Jesus, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

After the dramatic reading, discuss the following questions as a group.

- What were you feeling as you heard the story?
- What was most meaningful for you?
- How would you have felt if you were Lazarus? If you were Mary and Martha? If you were one of the Apostles?
- What do you think Jesus is teaching us in this story?

Have someone read the commentary on page 4.7 in *Living Well*.

You can almost feel the pain and grief and loss in the words of Martha and Mary. Their brother has died! Jesus’ response is filled with tenderness and emotion. He weeps and mourns with Martha and Mary. In his response we can see the profound way God is with us in our grief and pain. In this tender scene we experience the compassion of God embracing us in the midst of our suffering. Jesus is so moved by the experience that he goes to the tomb of Lazarus and brings him back to life. Jesus’ love – for Lazarus and for Martha and Mary – is stronger than death.

But there is more. Jesus promises Martha (and us) that those who live and believe in him will never die. Resurrection is not returning to live more of this life; it is a gift of eternal life from our loving God who raised Jesus from the dead. The amazing fact of our living out the dying and rising of Jesus, the paschal mystery, is that we already share in this eternal life. The already of eternal life is God’s grace at work in our lives. Its fullness will be known only after we die, but by living faithfully we have already begun this journey. This is why dying isn’t all there is.

2. Biblical Teaching on Death and Dying Well

Divide into four teams, have each team take one of the following four themes, and prepare a short presentation for the whole group summarizing the Biblical teaching and commentary on pages 4.8-4.10 in *Living Well*:

1. Grieving and Consoling
2. Giving Thanks and Remembering

3. Being Supported in the Christian Community
4. Dying to Self

Present each of the themes. After the presentation of the fourth theme discuss the following question:

- What did you learn about the Christian teaching on death and dying well from the dramatic reading of the story of Lazarus and the presentation of the four themes?

Part 4. *Living*: Application of the Christian Practice of Dying Well to Daily Life

1. “Learn How to Die, and You Learn How to Live.”

Begin this section by having someone read the excerpt from *Tuesdays with Morrie* on page 4.11 in *Living Well*.

2. The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die

Dr John Izzo interviewed 235 people from the age of 59-106 (who had over 18,000 years of life experience) asking them to reflect back on their lives: What brought happiness? What gave meaning? What did they regret? What did they wish they had learned sooner? What did not matter in the end? The “wise elders” were an incredibly diverse group ranging from a town barber to CEO’s, from poets to native chiefs, Holocaust survivors to war veterans, and represented all the major religions and cultures of our society.

The results of his interviews were published in his book, *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die*. In the book he identified the five secrets he learned from those that he interviewed:

1. Be true to yourself and live with intention (reflect more).
2. Leave no regrets (risk more).
3. Become more (love more).
4. Live in the moment (enjoy more).
5. Give more than you take (return more).

Read the description of the five secrets on pages 4.11-4.13. Use the questions on the handout, *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die*, to identify which of the five secrets you would like to improve in your life, and then develop specific ways you can live the secret in daily life.

After everyone has completed the activity, share ideas about how you will live the secrets in daily.

Summarize your learning from this activity by sharing responses to the following question:

- What insights about dying well did you gain from exploring The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die?
- What was the most important secret for you?

Conclude by having someone read the story of the “Ten-Hour Funerals.”

Additional Learning Activity: “The Last Lecture” by Randy Pausch

The life of Randy Pausch and his “Last Lecture” capture the essence of dying well. On September 18, 2007, computer science professor Randy Pausch stepped in front of an audience of 400 people at Carnegie Mellon University to deliver a last lecture called “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams.” With slides of his CT scans beaming out to the audience, Randy told his audience about the cancer that was devouring his pancreas and that would claim his life in a matter of months. On the stage that day, Randy was youthful, energetic, handsome, often cheerfully, darkly funny. He seemed invincible. But this was a brief moment, as he himself acknowledged. Randy’s lecture has become a phenomenon, as has the book he wrote based on the same principles, celebrating the dreams we all strive to make realities. Randy lost his battle to pancreatic cancer on July 25th, 2008, but his legacy will continue to inspire us all, for generations to come.

Go to www.thelastlecture.com to watch the video of Randy Pausch’s last lecture. Consider using excerpts from the video (on You Tube) to conclude this section of the session.

3. Preparing for Dying Well

How can we prepare for dying well? The suggestions on pages 4.13-4.14 in *Living Well* are offered as guidance for how to live in a way that prepares people for dying well. Take a few moments to read and reflect on these suggestions. Which ones are you already doing? Which ones can you start doing now?

1. Develop deep wellsprings of spiritual strength and insight.
2. Be part of a supportive community.
3. Trust in God’s power.
4. Listen to what others need and how they feel during times of pain and suffering; communicate what you need and how you feel during times of pain and suffering.
5. Write a spiritual journal.
6. Prayerfully read the Bible during times of pain and suffering.
7. Join a church community for worship, study, fellowship, support, and service.

4. Integrating the Christian Practice of Dying Well/Living Well into Daily Life

Conclude this session by identifying ways that you can integrate the Christian practice of Dying Well into your daily life. Use the following simple process to envision how you can integrate Dying Well into everyday life.

1. List 2-3 actions you would like to take to live the Christian practice of Dying Well as an individual or household.
2. Describe what you will do to put each action into practice, and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

When everyone is done, share one action idea with your group.

Part 5. Praying

Use one or both of the prayers on page 4.16 in *Living Well* to close the session.

Remembering

Remembering _____

■ What were the qualities of this person's life that showed a life well-lived?

■ In what ways do you remember this person's life and death?

(photo)

Your Bucket List: Developing a Life List

Making a “Life List” and making sure it stays current is a pretty good tool for keeping life and career on course. Create your “Life List,” of the things you want to *do* and become while you are alive. Making a list for your career is also a good idea: What do you want to *do* and to *become* during your career? Once you have the list, build in a time to check in with yourself every 2-3 months: Does the list still make sense? What must be added? What has been accomplished? What will be your focus for the months ahead?

Your Life List: Personal

Your Life List: Career

The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die

The Five Secrets

Living the Secrets

1. Be true to yourself and live with intention:

Reflect More.

- ✓ Am I following my heart and being true to my self?
- ✓ Is my life focused on the things that really matter to me?
- ✓ Am I being the person I want to be in the world?

2. Leave no regrets: Risk More.

- ✓ Do I act on my convictions? How do I want to act on them more deeply?
- ✓ What step would I take in my life right now if I were acting with courage, not fear?
- ✓ How am I responding to the setbacks in my life? Am I stepping forward or retreating?
- ✓ What might I do differently right now if I were living from the perspective of an old person on the porch looking back at my life?

3. Become more: Love More.

- ✓ Do I make room for friends, family, and relationships?
- ✓ Am I kind and loving to the people closest to me? How can I more loving toward them?
- ✓ Do I spread love and kindness in the world today? Am I making a difference in the world?

4. Live in the moment: Enjoy More.

- ✓ Do I fully enjoy whatever I am doing? Am I really “here” or just showing up?
- ✓ What I am grateful for each day? Do I wake up each day with thanks for another day?

5. Give more than you take: Return More.

- ✓ Am I making the world a better place?
- ✓ Do I remind myself that I am making a difference even if I don't see it?
- ✓ Am I kind, generous, and giving? How can I live more fully this way?

Resources for Developing the Christian Practice of Dying Well

“Dying Well.” Amy Plantinga Pauw. *Practicing Our Faith*. Dorothy C. Bass, editor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die. John Izzo. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008.

Based on a highly acclaimed public television series, this book takes the reader on a heartwarming and profound journey to find lasting happiness. John Izzo interviewed over 200 people, ages 60-106, each whom was identified by friends and acquaintances as “the one person they knew who had found happiness and meaning.” From town barbers to chiefs to CEO’s, these people had over 18,000 years of life experience between them. He asked them questions like, What brought you the greatest joy? What do you wish you had learned sooner? What ultimately mattered and what didn’t? Here Izzo shares their stories - funny, moving and thought-provoking -- and the Five Secrets he learned from listening to them. This book will make you laugh, bring you to tears and inspire you to discover what matters long before you die.

The Last Lecture. Randy Pausch. New York: Hyperion, 2008.

A lot of professors give talks titled “The Last Lecture.” Professors are asked to consider their demise and to ruminate on what matters most to them. And while they speak, audiences can’t help but mull the same question: What wisdom would we impart to the world if we knew it was our last chance? If we had to vanish tomorrow, what would we want as our legacy? When Randy Pausch, a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon, was asked to give such a lecture, he didn’t have to imagine it as his last, since he had recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer. But the lecture he gave—“Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams”—wasn’t about dying. It was about the importance of overcoming obstacles, of enabling the dreams of others, of seizing every moment (because “time is all you have...and you may find one day that you have less than you think”). It was a summation of everything Randy had come to believe. It was about living. In this book, Randy Pausch has combined the humor, inspiration and intelligence that made his lecture such a phenomenon and given it an indelible form. It is a book that will be shared for generations to come.

Tuesdays with Morrie. Mitch Albom. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Maybe it was a grandparent, or a teacher, or a colleague. Someone older, patient and wise, who understood you when you were young and searching, helped you see the world as a more profound place, gave you sound advice to help you make your way through it. For Mitch Albom, that person was Morrie Schwartz, his college professor from nearly twenty years ago. Maybe, like Mitch, you lost track of this mentor as you made your way, and the insights faded, and the world seemed colder. Wouldn’t you like to see that person again, ask the bigger questions that still haunt you, receive wisdom for your busy life today the way you once did when you were younger? Mitch Albom had that second chance. He rediscovered Morrie in the last months of the older man’s life. Knowing he was dying, Morrie visited with Mitch in his study every Tuesday, just as they used to back in college. Their rekindled relationship turned into one final “class:” lessons in how to live. *Tuesdays with Morrie* is a magical chronicle of their time together, through which Mitch shares Morrie’s lasting gift with the world.