

What Matters Most When You Are Dying

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Hospice care is committed to accompanying the dying to the other side. A British patient's request, "Watch with me," inspired Cicely Saunders to honor what was asked. Her sensitivity to suffering and mortality led her journey of hospice and palliative care which influenced medical providers in the United States. This motto, "No one will die alone," continues to provide reassurance to the loved one and support for the family.

The things that matter most in life really aren't "things." Ira Byock's four simple statements empower people to keep short relational accounts. In *Four Things that Matter Most*, he encourages families to say: "Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you." The past cannot be changed but comforting and healing words transform the moments before the last "good-bye."

During one of my chaplain visits, two sons (and a former daughter-in-law) had come to say good-bye to their father. They seemed hesitant and nervous but motivated to acknowledge that the father, miserably failing, had perpetuated relational abuse to the children even into adulthood. The adult children wanted to make things right but didn't quite know how. We all left the room for a few minutes. I admired their courage and explained how to use the four simple statements. They decided to go one at a time to say what needed to be said.

Walking in the hallway we supported the one entering the room. Deeply moved after the encounter, each chose a place of solitude. We reconnected for a short prayer. The estranged daughter-in law as well as the two sons completed doing what dying people want, even when they have been at fault. The experience was one of the most powerful reminders to "Watch with me."

To avoid distant and fractured relationships, it is never too late to express the things families deep down want to hear. Failure to live up to a lofty standard need not stand in the way of completing relational communication that paves the way to say, "Good-bye." Forgiveness from

past hurts provides inner well-being and avoids future anxiety. Forgiveness purifies the darkness of the soul in preparation for a peaceful journey through the process of dying. It resolves passing the grudge-baggage on to the next generation.

Grace exercised overcomes relational failure. The power of forgiveness releases the dying and empowers the family to move on in life with a clean slate. The ability to say “thank you” provides the grace to reconnect. Intentionally weaving a fabric of love from birth to death envelops not only the loved one but those who follow. Watch with forgiveness. Watch with thankfulness. Watch with love.