

## Questions for Dying Well (John Wyatt)

Website for this group: <http://alhibbard.com/death/>

\* - indicates a prioritized question

### Week 1. September 22 – Foreword, Introduction, Chapter 1 - Dying in the modern world

- 1.1 Review the first paragraph on p.x (that was actually started on p.ix). How do you think Tice (the writer of the Foreword) felt about being hesitant in his sharing with his mother his thoughts? Have you had a similar experience?
- 1.2 \* In the first (full) paragraph on p.x, Tice ends the paragraph with the term “triangle of pretence” [pretense for Americans]. What is he talking about? (Was this phrase used elsewhere?)
- 1.3 \* In the first page of the Introduction (p.xv), our author says “Years later it still hurts...”. Why does it still hurt?
- 1.4 \* In the first paragraph on p.xvi, Wyatt says “...most people are unprepared for dying...”. Why does he think people are unprepared? How prepared do you feel?
- 1.5 \* Read the first paragraph on p.xvii. What is Wyatt’s argument for why each of us should have a discussion about death and dying? Do you agree with his rationale?
- 1.6 Read the second paragraph on p.xvii. In the last sentence, how can these items in the list become manifest by learning to die well? Think about each one.
- 1.7 \* Read the second-to-last paragraph on p.2. What does Wyatt mean by “...death has become medicalized”?
- 1.8 \* In the last paragraph on p.2, the phrase “joint deception” is used. Explain. What is the *deception* and why is it described as *joint*?
- 1.9 After reading the last paragraph on p.3, think about the meaning of the quote by Verhey. We will visit this again. What is Wyatt trying to communicate?
- 1.10 Consider the first paragraph on p.4. Do you agree with this doctor’s assessment of the medical profession (as a general statement)? How do you respond to what Wyatt is writing?
- 1.11 \* Review and reflect on the section “The effect of...” (pp.5-6). How do you respond to this?
- 1.12 \* Consider the last two paragraphs on p.12. In the context of the section starting on p.11, what do you think Wyatt is trying to help us understand here?

### Week 2. September 29 – Chapter 2 - The art of dying, Chapter 3a - The opportunities that dying well may bring

- 2.1 \* According to the first paragraph on p.14, at what period in a person’s life was one advised to read/view *Ars moriendi*? Explain why during these times. How does this relate to the time table set up for this class (as given in the schedule) as we talk about the life cycle of an ill person?
- 2.2 \* In the last (full) paragraph on p.14, what are some potential specific things that a dying person at that time may choose to do instead of being passive? Have the choices changed for today?
- 2.3 \* Consider the paragraph started on the bottom of p.14 and finished on p.15. What does Wyatt want us to take away from this? How can we implement his encouragement?

- 3.1 Consider the first full paragraph on p.17. What is Wyatt's rationale (supported by points and scripture) as he gives the final sentence of the paragraph? Do you agree with this conclusion?
- 3.2 \* Consider the section starting on p.17 entitled "Death: an enemy." What is Wyatt's position that he is trying to establish? What is *your* response?
- 3.3 \* Review the introduction of the Dying well section starting on p.18 up to the item 1 of the list of 9 items (p.19). Summarize what you hear as being suggested to do. Do you agree with this as a process for dying well?
- 3.4 Who is *N* in the first quote in opportunity 1?
- 3.5 Consider the first paragraph on p.20. How do you respond to this? Do you have any support for or against the ideas here? Explain.
- 3.6 \* Review from the last paragraph on p.20 to the first paragraph on p.22 (ending in the word "eternity"). Now also read I Samuel 16:7. Summarize how these instruct us to "see" an older or dying person. Additionally, do these ideas influence your willingness to be an organ donor (or even a body donor)? Why or why not? [You may also find II Cor. 5:1-4 related to the donor question, though a bit harder to read.]
- 3.7 \* Consider the quote starting on the bottom of p.22 and ending at the top of the next that involves a woman with liver cancer. How was she able to say the things that she did?
- 3.8 Consider the last paragraph before opportunity 2 on p.23. Have any of you experienced this? If so, describe the experience; if not, try to explain how this might be.

### **Week 3. October 6 – Chapter 3 continued - The opportunities that dying well may bring**

- 3.9 \* Reread opportunity 2 (pp.23-25). From where does one obtain the ability to be thankful? How is this actually implemented in practical terms?
- 3.10 \* Reread opportunity 3. Why should one be interested in restoring broking relationships between God, family, and friends? What is in it for me?
- 3.11 \* Reread opportunity 4. Though forgiveness is sometimes the natural by-product of exercising opportunity 3, it can also come in ways as illustrated in this section. Besides Mary's impending death, how did she become prepared to enter into forgiveness? What can you do to prepare a dying loved one to forgive you and likewise, what can you do in order for you to forgive a dying loved one?
- 3.12 \* Reread opportunity 5. Suppose that you have a loved one who is dying. What are some specific things that you can do or say to this person to reflect letting go? Conversely, if you imagine yourself as the dying one, what are some specific things you can do or say to someone you love to indicate that you are letting go?
- 3.13 \* Reread opportunity 6. Have you received a non-financial (and non-material) legacy from someone that loved you? Describe it. How did it impact you? If all your legacies were material or financial, consider if you received some intangible legacies, perhaps implicitly if not explicitly. Consider the examples of legacy described by Wyatt. Which would you like to receive? Which would you be willing to give? If you are giving one, when should you begin your preparations for them?
- 3.14 \* Reread opportunity 7. Have you witnessed someone like Stuart who redirected his life when he knew his days were numbered? Explain. Describe how you might refocus your energy in your last days.

- 3.15 \* Reread opportunity 8. Do you know of someone who followed a dream in her/his last days? What dream might you wish to pursue when you are in your last days? What is your response to the phrase “to live until you die”?
- 3.16 \* Reread opportunity 9. If you have at times experienced the act of living in the moment, what did you do to achieve that? What benefits are there for engaging in the presence of the moment? What would you like to be doing, experiencing, or being with when you are crossing the finishing line?

#### **Week 4. October 13 – Chapter 4 - The challenges of dying well**

- 4.1 On page 40, what are your responses to the original 5 temptation/virtue pairs and to the 2 new ones Wyatt added? Do these temptations seem real and form an appropriate list? Do the corresponding virtues offer opportunities to address the temptations? Elaborate.
- 4.2 Read Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s poem on pp.42-43. With what is Bonhoeffer wrestling? What is his resolution to this struggle?
- 4.3 \* Read the C. S. Lewis quote that starts on p.43 and finishes on p.44. Describe what Lewis is feeling or experiencing. Can you relate? Do you agree with Wyatt’s assessment of the writing in the paragraph that follows?
- 4.4 \* Consider the first paragraph on p.46. First, what does this imply about the value of a local church community? Second, why does Wyatt implore us to think in advance of whom we can call upon for help?
- 4.5 Top of p.48: Behold the man. From where, and by whom, is this quote?
- 4.6 \* Consider the first two new paragraphs on p.48. First, how can we avoid taking these regrets all the way to our death bed? Second, what response can we give to the elderly who have prayed that God will take them, but the prayer is not answered (yet)?
- 4.7 \* At the top of p.49, Wyatt suggests honesty as the best response to despair. Why does he say this?
- 4.8 \* Read p.50 and also Phil. 3:7-16 with a focus on v.10. Compare the quote of St. Bernard at the top of the page to what Paul says in this passage in Philippians. [As an aside, Phillipians 3 is one of my favorite chapters.]
- 4.9 Read from the middle of p.51 to the end of the 2nd temptation section. What do you learn about hope from this portion?
- 4.10 \* What are your take-aways from the section on the third temptation (pp.52-53)?
- 4.11 \* Concerning the fourth temptation (pp.54-55), what are some specific, concrete steps that we can execute to grow in our sense of humility? (And a first-place medal will be given to the one with the best answer.)
- 4.12 \* Consider the discussion on the temptation of greed and its response of letting go as found on pp.55-59. What did you learn? What aspects will be relatively easy for you to implement and which more difficult?
- 4.13 Consider the last part of the fifth temptation with the story of Alan Toogood. What are your reflections on this?
- 4.14 \* After rereading the middle paragraph on p.62 and also reading II Tim. 4:7, respond to what this paragraph is communicating.

- 4.15 \* Review from the last paragraph on p.62 to the end of p.63. How do you respond to this? What is important for you?
- 4.16 \* Starting with the paragraph in the middle of p.65, read carefully until the new section on p.66. Have you experienced this with anyone? How can one respond to someone with this mindset?
- 4.17 \* Pages 66-68 has the response to the denial of death. Reread this and produce a Scripture-based approach that you think will work for you to implement for yourself.
- 4.18 \* Read about temptation #7. Does this raise any issues? Were you challenged? What are your thoughts about this?
- 4.19 \* Read pp.70-75 about the response. Does this raise any concerns? Did you see yourself in any part? What are your thoughts about this?

## **Week 5. October 20 – Chapter 5 - Communicating honestly**

- 5.1 \* Study the chart on p.77 and the discussion that follows. Now review the Action Steps handout from week 2. Where on the timeline in the chart should you be thinking of the week 2 action steps? Now look at the week 3 action steps and answer the same question. Now look at the week 4 action steps and answer when is the best time on this time line to consider these and when is the latest time to consider them. Finally, look at the week 5 action steps (which you may not see until you get to class, so we can do this together if this is the case) and answer the last question again for these. What is the point of this exercise?
- 5.2 Review the “What symptoms...” section on pp.78-79. Are there any issues here that are of concern to you?
- 5.3 \* Reread the “Should I carry...” section on pp.80-81. This is an incredibly important section and it really helps to think about these issues early. There is no “right” answer, as Wyatt says, so you need to weigh out the pros and cons of your choices. What criteria are important to you to help you decide how you wish to proceed for yourself when the time left is clearly short?
- 5.4 \* Read the “Should I agree...” section (pp.82-84) carefully enough that you feel that you understand the nuances of the question about a DNR order. Now, imagine that you are helping your parent or other elderly relative try to come to a decision about this issue. Write out an explanation that you would share with this loved one conveying the implications of both choosing to have CPR and not choosing CPR. Write your explanation in a way that does not convey a bias and is clear enough to be understood by someone who may be mildly senile.
- 5.5 \* Considering the issues in the “Where would...” section, what is your answer (for yourself) to this question and why?
- 5.6 Read the “Who will support...” section. Do you agree with the assumption given in the statement “We are not alone in the Christian family...”? How will you choose who you may wish to be your spiritual support?

## **Week 6. October 27 – Chapter 6 - Learning from the example of Jesus**

- 6.1 \* As you read pages 85–92 (first section), what idea(s) stood out to you?
- 6.2 \* Review the “Father, forgive them...” section on pp.92-93. Why is forgiving others and being forgiven emphasized here and in the Christian tradition?

- 6.3 \* After rereading the “Today, you will...” section (pp.94-96), reflect on what new idea or nuance came to you from reading these words. Did you feel encouraged?
- 6.4 Put yourself in Mary’s shoes as you reread pp.96-97. What is going through your mind and what is happening to your spirit inside?
- 6.5 \* Review page 101. Wyatt endorses lamenting. What value do you see in doing so?
- 6.6 \* On p.103, review the first paragraph after the midpoint starting with “But dying well...”. Let’s focus on the metaphorical thirst of having longings not completed. What are some longings that one may have at the time of death that may not be able to be met at that point? Is there anything one can do to either avoid this or to reduce the weight of these longings?
- 6.7 \* Look at the last paragraph of the section that ends on p.106. Wyatt has talked about what it means to die well for the last 100 pages or so. Is this a complete answer to what it means or is it “just” a reasonable summary? If you feel that it is complete, justify why you think so; if not, what is missing or how could you modify it? It may be relevant to see if the last question helps.
- 6.8 \* Focus on the paragraph on p.107 that starts with “Dying well involves...”. Do you agree with Wyatt’s encouragement for a dying person to request assistance to complete tasks like these mentioned? Instead of waiting to be asked, what can a caregiver do? Can this list of tasks be expanded? How can you know what things the dying person may need or want?
- 6.9 \* Finally, focus on the next paragraph (and continues on p.108). Recall that we discussed “letting go” starting on p.55. If you have an important loved one at the final hours before death, will you be able to convey this message of encouraging your loved one to “let go – go to your Father”? If you cannot readily respond affirmatively, and assuming that you want to be able to do so, what can you do now to prepare yourself so that you can do so at the needed time?

## **Week 7. November 3 – Chapter 7 - A sure and steadfast hope**

- 7.1 \* Reread (perhaps several times) from the bottom of p.110 to the end of the section on p.113. In my view, this portion has some non-trivial notions to try pick up. Can you articulate some of the key ideas?
- 7.2 \* Review the first paragraph on p.114. Do you identify with Wyatt’s assessment of inside versus outside of people? How can we improve our “vision” so that we can have the willingness, patience, or love to look past the outside of a person to see the inside? Can we put on a new set of glasses so that we can breakdown barriers: racial, economic, employment, gender, immigration, wealth, education, ethnic, class, physical appearance, medical challenges and so on?
- 7.3 \* From the section “It is sown...” (pp.115-116), what ideas here do you agree with, which do you have questions about, and which do you disagree? Explain.
- 7.4 \* Consider the section “Falling asleep” (pp.119-123). How do you respond to this? Follow the format as in the last question.
- 7.5 From the section “Awakening to behold...” (pp.123-125), what questions did this material raise and what did you learn?
- 7.6 What comments or questions arise from reading the last pages 125-127?

## Week 8. November 10 – Appendix (1) - For carers and relatives

- 8.1 \* Starting the conversation: As in many aspects of life, the hardest part is the beginning – starting on a bicycle, opening a conversation when you are in a line (queue, as Wyatt would say), offering apologies after an argument, pushing a stalled car and so on. The same applies here. Two examples are given here, both of which are great. Can you think of others? Additionally, what is your response about listening?
- 8.2 \* Review the content of pp.130-131. For our own future selves, what can we do now to reduce the amount and variety of pains that we may feel as we approach death? For those that we may play a role as a caregiver or some other supportive role for a dying person, what can we do to disarm the pains that this person may be experiencing.
- 8.3 \* Review from the bottom of p.131 to the first third of p.135. There are many issues here that have already been discussed in the book and/or through the other half of our sessions. Since these are so important, this may be a good time for each of you to honestly share any concerns or questions that you have on these topics.
- 8.4 \* Reread the first part of question 2 (pp.136-139). There are a number of issues here (some of which have already been considered). Which issues are most important to you as a potential future dying person and which are most important to you as a potential caregiver of a dying person? Explain why.
- 8.5 \* Consider the last two issues raised starting on pages 140 and 141. For the first, do any of you have any other suggestions on how to deal with this difficult issue? For the second, what other ideas do you have to say as you communicate a farewell?