

## Praise For

# MERCY

LIFE IN THE SEASON OF DYING

“In this sacred journal, Peter vulnerably shares ‘riches stored in secret places’—intimate and holy moments with the dying, illuminating the promise of Psalm 116:15: ‘His loved ones are very precious to him, and he does not lightly let them die.’”

—MOIRA BROWN, author, and former host of *100 Huntley Street*

“To pull life from death is a great calling upon the Christian community. Roebelen’s book does this honestly, beautifully, and with a compelling awareness that can only come from a hand that has held many in the journey towards death. I first read this while holding the hand of my sleeping mother, who is in her own season of dying. Having been absent, in a variety of ways, in the death of my father, I am now deeply grateful for a book that calls us (and shows us the way) to presence and life in the season of dying.”

—GREG PENNOYER,

Editor of *God With Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Christmas*

“An open, thoughtful discussion, not just about death, but the journey of life as we face the inevitability of death. This book calls us to live well so that dying well is possible. Most of all, it is an intimate insight to a pastor’s heart—one who has walked openly with people he loved and cared about as they entered the mystery of dying. This is essential reading for anyone entering into the debates of a society fearful of death.”

—DR. GARY V. NELSON, President, Tyndale University College and Seminary

“All of us are already somewhere on the journey toward dying. Whether you are enjoying abundant health or saying goodbyes, *Mercy* is a guide filled with intimate stories, shared with a shepherd’s heart and overflowing with precious wisdom not just for dying well but for living well every day.”

—DR. STEVE A. BROWN, President, Arrow Leadership, and  
author of *Leading Me: Eight Practices for a Christian Leader’s  
Most Important Assignment*

“Accompanying dying people is the most privileged part of pastoral ministry and also the toughest. This book’s heartening testimonies demonstrate paradoxical gifts and blessings from the end of life. Discover how a dedicated pastor overcame fear of working with the dying and became an agent of God’s healing and hope in the direst of circumstances.”

—REV. ARTHUR PAUL BOERS, author of *Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions*

“How do you help someone to die? Or those left behind? Realizing he had come up against his own limits as a pastor, Peter Roebbelen turns to the experience of those he has seen over the threshold. In their responses, he discovers what he calls the gifts of dying—which, when attended to, can transform the very way we live. Here is an honest account of a believer living at the edge of what we can understand in facing our own shared mortality.”

—JERUSHA MCCORMACK, author of *Grieving, A Beginner’s Guide*

“So often in the presence of death the Christian response is to pray for healing so life will continue. Turning that notion on its head, this book demonstrates that life and healing can actually be part of death both for those who are approaching the end of life on the earth as well as for those who are walking with them. But what is both disarming and helpful is that the author gives us a vulnerable glimpse into his own inner discovery around this complex subject, and in the process, invites readers to confront our own journey as we move toward death.”

—DR. ROD WILSON, former President, Regent College, Vancouver,  
and co-author of *Keeping Faith in Fundraising*

“Although arguably the most important topic for us all, dying is never easy to discuss. Breathing life into personal stories of death is a wonderful way to engage others in dialogue. In *Mercy*, Roebbelen does just that, and with the imagery of acknowledging death’s reality—not with our hands up in human submission, but instead with our ‘palms up’ in Christian surrender.”

—MEGORY ANDERSON, PHD,  
author of *Sacred Dying Journal: Reflections on Embracing the End of Life*

*Peter Roebbelen*

# MERCY

LIFE IN THE SEASON OF DYING



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TO SHARON, ERICA, AND JULIA  
who keep showing me what it means to live abundantly.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND BOB,  
whose spirit of grace, integrity, and kingdom still guides me.

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## INTRODUCTION

WHEN I BECAME A PASTOR NEARLY 30 YEARS AGO, no one warned me about death and dying. Nobody told me I would watch so many friends die. During one particularly difficult decade, the deaths came in waves. As one wave overwhelmed me emotionally and spiritually, I barely had time to get my head above water and catch my breath before I saw the next wave cresting towards me. I spent weeks, months, and years walking with dear friends, helping them to grieve, and in the process, I did not grieve well. Though I encouraged them to cry, I rarely did. In helping them to die well, I seemed to be living poorly. The weight of sadness darkened my soul.

During a life-giving sabbatical, I began to work through my losses, trying to make sense of all the specific and personal deaths, but also death in general. I needed healing for my own journey of grief and also longed for understanding.

Why does a 43-year-old husband and father of two die after a three-and-a-half-year battle with ALS? Why does a 57-year-old woman suffer through 18 years of cancer treatments and finally succumb, leaving daughters, a grandchild, parents, and siblings? Why does a three-year-old fall off a dock and drown? Why does a 43-year-old mother of three contract an exceedingly rare form of brain cancer that claims her life within two years of discovery? Why do parents have to bury their only two children within six weeks of each other?

Even now the thought of these events disorients me, short-circuiting my understanding of life and faith. As I write about these experiences, I join a large group of men and women who

have, through the years, tried to make some sense out of death, an event most commonplace, yet shocking in its ruthless and disturbing randomness.



Rethinking death is especially challenging since the subject dominates much of our interior landscape as well as our culture. Books, movies, TV shows, and news all incorporate death as a major theme and focus. We are fascinated and frightened by death in general while simultaneously finding it virtually impossible to come to grips with our own mortality. To have a healthy, mature, and truthful understanding of death is rare—except, perhaps, amongst the dying.

As we struggle with death, we should not stop being sad or stop grieving over the loss of loved ones. No, not at all. But we should be clear about what our head tells our heart, even while our heart is breaking. A healthy emotional view of death will allow for a healthy emotional view of life. Preparing for a good death will result in living a good life. If we stop approaching the subject of death with fear, awkwardness, uncertainty, and denial, we can more fully participate in that abundant life God says is ours to have.

This book does not answer the really hard questions such as what happens at the moment of death, or what is heaven like, or the most difficult question of all: why? In fact, this is not an answer book at all. It is much more a book of discovery.

During my time of grieving and reflecting, God showed me that every death has within it the possibility of new life. This is not a new thought. Jesus taught that every seed must die, that is, be buried in the ground, for new life to occur. Jesus predicted that out of his death much good would come. But we rarely focus on new

life during a season of grief. Our pain often blinds us to all that is really happening. We do not look for signs of life and, therefore, we do not see them.

While this was a much-needed reminder for me, the more significant discovery was that the *journey* towards death, and not just the death itself, brought with it surprising gifts of life. God showed me that my dying friends were never more alive than in their season of dying. I glimpsed this new life on occasion, marveling at the grace and peace with which some of the dying faced their end; but God was showing me more than a courageous death. The dying were living better than I was. They were more fully alive, more fully present, more keenly aware of what was important and what was needed. This was an awareness that came upon me gradually, and my first response was an increased gratitude for God's mercy to the dying—for the many gifts of life I had not fully appreciated along the way. And then, I was humbled by the many gifts my dying friends were regularly giving to me—only some of which I caught in the moment.

As I journeyed with my dying friends, I held their hands, prayed for their healing, listened to their unanswerable questions, cried with them, counseled them a little and learned from them a lot. I continue to be in close relationship with many of their loved ones. These dead friends and surviving family members constitute a faithful “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 11–12) that continue to shape my understanding of dying and living. They bear witness to the pain and the unfairness of death but also to incredible grace and beauty, hope and courage, peace and surrender. They are a portal to the life God intends us to live. This book is filled with their stories, their wisdom, and their tears.

I am so very grateful for the permission to include these stories in this book. There would not be a book without them. Most of the people mentioned in this book, if they are still alive,

have had a chance to review their stories. For those who have died, I have contacted family members for permission. In most cases, the names, dates, places, and events are meant to be accurate, but it is possible I have confused some of the details. In a few stories, where I have been unable to make contact with family members, I have changed the names and left out identifying details. As I journeyed with the dying, I heard and witnessed many things that are simply too personal and too holy to share.

There are many helpful books about the dying process and about coping with loss and what to expect as one journeys through grief. This is not one of those books. This book looks at the possibility of life in the face of death's certainty. With the dying and their caregivers showing the way, this is a book for hopeful living.

I cannot help bringing my worldview to the writing of this book. I experience the world as a follower of Jesus Christ. I believe a good and loving God incarnated himself in the fully human, fully divine Jesus. In a mysterious display of outrageous love, the perfect, sinless Jesus willingly died for our wrongdoings, so we might have the possibility of eternal life with the God who created us and continues to love us. This possibility is realized when we acknowledge our selfish and pride-filled ways, ask God for forgiveness, and commit our lives to honor and follow Jesus as the One who saves us from ourselves. One critical implication of this worldview is that those who die in Christ, that is, those who have chosen to honor and follow Jesus, look forward to new and eternal life both now and after physical death. Death is not the end. There is an ongoing heaven, and it is profoundly good. We have great confidence we will see God with our own eyes. This belief in God who loves us, Jesus who saves us, and eternity that awaits us is the grid through which I process my experiences with the dying. Those who believe physical death marks the complete end to their existence will, in all likelihood, view death (and life) quite differently.

The book you have in your hands did not start out to be a book. It started as journal entries, notes, scribbles, thoughts, and reflections as I took time to work through my own grief. As God brought a measure of healing to my heart and some new understanding to my mind, I began to wonder if others might be helped by my journey of death and discovery. I wondered if those facing their own death might find this to be a source of life and a source of hope. I wondered if caregivers and loved ones might see in these pages a new way of perceiving the death journey. I also hoped this might be an encouragement to those who are healthy, to those of us who appear to be in no imminent risk of dying—an encouragement to take a closer look at death and receive some guidance from the dying on how to live. This book is about finding life in the season of dying. One way to summarize this book might be to suggest this:

Loving well allows us to live well.

Living well prepares us to die well.

Dying well produces new life.

Although I include many stories from different death and dying experiences, there are a few deaths that have impacted me more deeply than others. I start with the story of Dave's death and end with Bob's death, and, in between, I mention these two men several times. It is not that their stories are more important than others but simply that Dave and Bob were close friends whose life and death continue to influence me. I think about them often.

The book is somewhat loosely organized around a series of gifts experienced by the dying and their caregivers. I speak of "gift" as a surprising act of grace bestowed upon the dying by God, who loves us deeply in life and death. Some of these gifts, such as peace, love, and simplicity, have an intuitive sense about them.

Others, such as dependence, time, and reverence, seem rather strange and require more explanation. The gifts are presented in chapters 2-19. The order in which they are presented, although not random, lacks any real significance. They are a collection of life-giving mercies bestowed upon the dying in ways that cannot be prescribed or predicted. They are, however, available.

The final few chapters are given to a somewhat broader exploration of death, including our almost universal fear of death, the danger of ignoring death, preparation for a good death, and the surprising life that continues to emerge in the midst of death.

I readily acknowledge there is much about death and dying, life and living that remains beyond my understanding. When friends lost their only son, I told them I did not understand why their son had died. In the face of inconsolable grief, there was much I did not know. Forty-four days later, these same parents laid to rest their only daughter. And in the midst of incomprehensible sorrow, I confessed to knowing even less.

That confession holds true today.

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# Dave's Story

IN SEPTEMBER 1997, LORIE AND DAVE RECEIVED THE NEWS Dave had ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a motor neuron disease that causes the muscles to weaken and atrophy. Science and medicine know no cure. For the next three-and-a-half years, Dave and Lorie, their two daughters, Candace and Meghan, their extended family, and friends pitched battle against this devastating disease. Over those years, I became close friends with Dave and Lorie, gaining the privilege of walking with them in life's final journey. Although hard and painful, the journey was rich and full of life. Dave and Lorie, Candace and Meghan taught me much about loving and living and dying. So much so, I have yet to take it all in. Dave's spirit continues to bring me new life. The following account describes Dave's final days.

It was Sunday and Mother's Day. With our church service finished and the last of the equipment put away, I got into my car and headed home for lunch—a lunch I had planned and now needed to prepare for my wife and our two daughters. Dinner was also my responsibility that day, but we would never get that far. On the way home, a very anxious Lorie called me on my cell phone with the news that Dave was nonresponsive. Although he was still breathing, Lorie could not wake him up. He had gone to sleep as usual the night before but could not be roused even though it was now midday. We quickly decided Lorie should call an ambulance.

Before I got home, Lorie called again to tell me the ambulance was on its way. The cell phone rang for the third time, and Lorie, now in the ambulance with her husband, was clearly panicking. The paramedics had asked Lorie a question she was not prepared for: “Do you want us to take heroic measures?” The question exploded like a bomb in Lorie’s head. She was not ready for Dave to die. Not like this. Although the battle had been long and draining, it felt as if death had just made a surprise appearance. Lorie and Dave were not finished with life quite yet. And so, we decided everything possible should be done to keep Dave alive.

When I arrived home and explained the situation to my wife, we both knew Mother’s Day plans would have to wait. Soon I joined Lorie in the emergency room of Mississauga’s Credit Valley Hospital. The staff worked hard to bring Dave back from the brink of death. They put a breathing tube down his throat and hooked him up to a respirator. They tested him for a number of possible causes for the sudden downturn. After two hours, they concluded the disease had simply progressed too far: Dave’s breathing could no longer sustain his body. There would be no quick fix, no antibiotics, no treatments, no procedures. Dave was dying. The ALS had reached its final stage.

The rest of that day and Monday were painful, grueling days for Dave. With the help of the respirator, Dave regained consciousness. The respirator kept him breathing, but he could barely communicate, his discomfort clearly evident.

In the midst of these dark hours, something very comforting occurred. The community gathered to bear witness to life’s greatest passage. Lorie, Candace, and Meghan were already at the hospital. But soon extended family members arrived, followed by Lorie and Dave’s closest friends. And then it seemed like a dam burst somewhere, and the hospital corridors could no longer contain all the friends and neighbors and caregivers and work associates

and even more distant relatives. They came to pray, to support, to love, to grieve, and to say good-bye. They brought emotional encouragement and spiritual strength. By their presence, they declared death should not be faced alone.

Dave's community took up residence in the large waiting area just outside the Critical Care Unit (CCU) where Dave lay dying. In the final 80 hours of Dave's life, members of the community were always present. They ebbed and flowed in numbers and in composition, but the community of care never disappeared. And the people came not just to watch a loved one die but also to encourage and support and embrace and to help in many practical ways.

The community brought with them a constant supply of food. Whenever Lorie, Candace, or Meghan left the CCU and reconnected with friends and family in the hallway, invariably they could choose from a never-ending supply of muffins, donuts, and cold drinks, but also full lunches and dinners. Multi-course meals for 10 to 15 people showed up regularly—a profoundly simple demonstration of practical love in action.

Some people came and stayed for days, some people came and stayed for minutes. The length of time did not matter—showing up did.

On Tuesday, Dave decided to go off the respirator in response to a powerful encounter with God in which God reassured Dave of his presence and said, "Trust me." Family and friends gathered around his bedside and we read a psalm and prayed, and then we held our collective breath as the doctor removed the tube from Dave's throat and turned off the machine. Dave, his voice raspy and weak, began to speak. He said, "I see a light." I thought, this is incredible—he's seeing Jesus coming to take him home. "I see a light," repeated Dave, "and it's right up there"—and he motioned to the ceiling light over his bed. Incredibly, it was a joke! When

we realized Dave was playing with us, we all laughed. And with the laughter, the tension, anxiety, and fear all melted away. One moment we expected Dave to give up his spirit, to breathe his last, and the next moment we were laughing. How does that happen? How could we laugh when we had a dying man in our midst? Better still, why would a dying man, hardly able to speak, use his precious energy to make us laugh? I suspect he had the joke worked out long before he came off the respirator. Unbelievable.

Before long we were crying again. Within a few hours, Dave's diminished breathing caused him to slip back into a nonresponsive state—almost like a coma. We all thought the end had finally come. Lorie, Candace, and Meghan stayed by Dave's side throughout Tuesday night and into the next morning. Around 11 AM on Wednesday, with Dave hovering on the brink of death, we prayed, cried again, and said our good-byes to a body that quite frankly already looked dead. Only Dave's shallow breathing gave evidence he was still alive.



And then, incredibly, miraculously, Dave woke up. I don't know how else to say it. He simply *woke up*. I find it hard to describe what we experienced in that moment and in the following hours. It seemed as if the Spirit of God descended upon Dave and brought new life to his body. Dave's eyes began to sparkle. His breathing strengthened. His speech improved dramatically. And he was energized, fully alert. But even more dramatic than his renewed physical body was his renewed spirit. It seemed Dave's spirit had taken control of his decaying body and willed it back into action. We were awestruck by such a dramatic intervention from God.

When a man awakens from a deathlike coma, it is pretty exciting news. The nurses just shook their heads, bewildered and

astonished. Someone called Dave's family doctor, and he rushed over and we stood there side by side, marveling at Dave's new life. The doctor said quietly, reverently, hopefully, "You know, it wouldn't surprise me if he got up and walked out of here."

News of Dave's "awakening" filtered out into the hospital corridors and waiting rooms and even further to friends and family members who, having said their final good-byes, had already returned home. His room filled with speechless loved ones who did not know what to think or do. Eventually, all but one returned to the waiting room to allow Dave some time with his wife and daughters. The one who stayed behind began to share that he no longer wanted to carry on his current lifestyle and was ready to begin a new life as a follower of Jesus. I can still see Dave's gaunt face stretched wide with the biggest, most beautiful smile. What a timely, precious answer to Dave and Lorie's many years of praying. In Dave's dying, Jesus brought new life. New life out of death—what a paradox.

In an incredible display of dying well, Dave spent the rest of that Wednesday encouraging and giving new life to others. He challenged many of his family and friends to a new or renewed faith in Christ. He encouraged us to live honorable and godly lives. Over an eight-hour period, Dave met with and spoke to every member of his family and Lorie's family and many of his closest friends. They would come to his bedside in small shifts, in twos and threes, and he had personal words of blessing and encouragement and challenge for each one. We received Dave's words, along with his remarkable alertness and energy, as a wonderful gift from God.

We, who had come as encouragers and supporters, we who had come as the hands and feet of Jesus, met Jesus in the one we had come to serve. We, the healthy, found ourselves ministered to by the dying. Perhaps Dave was the healthiest one of all that day.

As the afternoon moved into the evening, Dave's strength and our excitement began to fade. Lorie and I looked at each other with a quiet sense of knowing: the end was near. While the extended family and friends stayed out in the waiting area, Dave spent his final hours blessing and encouraging his wife and children. I have these images seared into my mind and heart as Dave, in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, first blessed Candace and then Meghan and then Lorie. We stood on holy ground. Dave's inspired words conveyed his love and admiration and respect for each of his girls. He shared with them pictures of a special future. He told them over and over again how proud he was of them, and how much he loved them. He told them of his absolute assurance he would soon be in heaven. And he told them not to be angry with God. Dave spent the last hours of his life encouraging and giving peace to his family.

Dave's final hour was surreal. With Candace and Meghan holding his hands and with Lorie and me on either side of his head, and with his voice barely a whisper, Dave turned to Lorie and said, "Sing me home." And Lorie sang his favorite song. And then David turned to me and said, "Pray me home." And I prayed. And with my hand on his head, I reminded my dear friend he was the beloved son of God, he had fulfilled all his earthly duties, he was free to go, and he had blessed us beyond measure.

When Dave quietly slipped away around 9:15 on Wednesday evening, Lorie, Candace, and Meghan had done everything they could possibly do and had said everything that needed to be said. In the end, they did not flinch, they did not turn their heads or avert their eyes. Dave died with Lorie's kisses on his lips and with his daughters' hands in his hands.

Within minutes of Dave's passing, Meghan announced, through her tears, she could picture her Dad in heaven doing cartwheels, free from the body that had failed him, able to move

without assistance, completely healed. In the final days, the community of care gave the Moreaus a little taste of heaven. In turn, quite unexpectedly, Dave gave us a taste of heaven as well. Dave's death continues to give me life.

I share Dave's story with you because it illustrates a number of the gifts described in the following chapters. My three-year journey with the Moreaus brought me great joy and deep grief. It was destabilizing, disorienting, and confusing. But Dave taught me so much. I didn't know at the time Dave's death was the first wave in a decade of deaths that would ultimately lead to the writing of this book.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul describes God's intent for people who follow Jesus. Paul presents this desired end-state in the metaphor of putting on new clothes.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

—Colossians 3:12–17, NLT

We put aside the old clothes of our former, immature, and self-centered lives and put on new clothes consistent with spiritual and emotional maturity. Within this metaphor, Paul presents a whole list of attributes, attitudes, and characteristics that are gifts from God—gifts we share with the world around us. Many of the dying have put on their new clothes while the rest of us are too busy and too preoccupied to bother changing.

Given that we will die, how then shall we live? Given that we will all face the death of loved ones, how shall we carry on?

The chapters that follow attempt to describe some of the new life, wisdom, and insights I discovered in my journey with the dying. But be warned, even the best of deaths remains painful and messy. The dying and those who love them often experience the journey quite differently. While I doubt I have captured all the life God brings to the dying, I fear even this partial list may cause further grief, pain, and, perhaps, guilt to some. You might wonder why your dying is not like those described in this book. My hope and sincere intent is not to add more pain but to share the possibility of experiencing life in the season of dying and, thereby, perceiving death in a new and life-giving way.

## TWO

# Dependence

VICKY WAS A FIERCELY INDEPENDENT, MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN who became a dear friend over the years. Her outlook on life was shaped by being raised in an emotionally barren family, by her own failed marriage that left her to raise two daughters on her own, and by her 18-year battle with cancer. Vicky was tough, but in the sweetest of ways. She was a lovely lady—generous, gracious, never asking for much, but always quick to lend a hand. Vicky did not complain about her pain—physical or emotional. During her numerous cancer flare-ups, her daughters and friends would repeatedly ask, “How are you doing?”, to which she typically replied, “I’m doing okay. How are you?” She didn’t like to talk very much about her visits to the doctors, the chemo and radiation treatments, or the constant concern about where and when the next spot would appear. And when friends asked, “Can we do anything to help?” Vicky would often reply, “I’m good for now. Thanks for asking.” Vicky’s sweet, gentle manner masked an emotional distance few could breach.

But Vicky changed. Slowly, the cancer began to chip away at the protective walls. Tears replaced the toughness. Giving gave way to receiving. In the final few years of her life, Vicky embraced the love and support of family and friends. Now she allowed them to get groceries, clean her apartment, and share in the emotion of her life-and-death struggle.

As the end neared, her daughter Nicole invited Vicky to live with her. I can still see the expression of joy and gratitude on Vicky's face when she told me about the invitation. Nicole provided a safe home for her mom. Both daughters, Nicole and Sarah, and several of Vicky's friends provided regular and ongoing care in her final months. Vicky passed away in her daughter's home in the loving embrace of family and friends. Vicky's move from stoic independence to grateful dependence benefited the caregivers as well, bringing them a measure of peace and contentment.



The dying experience huge loss—the loss of health, the loss of mobility, the loss of independence, the loss of doing simple everyday things. In the midst of this loss, the dying can experience the gift of dependence. Many would protest describing dependence as a gift. But we move off this earthly stage the same way we enter—in a state of complete dependence. When the dying accept their dependent state and allow others to care for them, they receive a profound gift that benefits both them and their caregivers. When friends, loved ones, volunteers, and professionals come alongside the dying in loving and compassionate ways, they awaken this wonderful life-giving gift in the dying. At the same time, when the dying allow us the privilege of caring for them, we receive much joy and fulfillment.

The sick and dying initially resist the journey towards dependence. Perhaps they believe dependence and weakness go hand-in-hand, and their pride prevents them from going down that road. Some see the struggle to remain independent as noble and heroic—a battle best fought to the bitter end. Unfortunately, this often results in resentment, anger, shame, and a sense of uselessness. The continued progression of their illness is felt as

personal failure or as a deep disappointment in God and the medical system. This heroic battle only ever ends one way—in death. We have no choice in this. We will all surely die. We do, however, have a choice in how we die. Will we die with clenched fists railing against the unfairness of life? Or will we, with open hands, receive all the love that awaits us? As the dying accept the reality of their cumulative losses, they open themselves up to receive the love and compassionate care of others. Loss creates a huge hole in our heart, and it hurts a lot. But there is much love to fill that hole—if we allow it.

Henri Nouwen claims the first task in preparing oneself to die well is to become like a child again. He says entering a second childhood is essential to dying a good death.<sup>1</sup> Jesus said the same thing: “Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3, *NRSV*). What does it mean to become like a child again? Many things, I suspect—wide-eyed wonder, innocence, absolute faith, but most of all, entering a new level of dependence. Children depend greatly (almost completely) on parents, teachers, and friends. In most cultures, the journey towards adulthood parallels the move towards independence. Then, when we get old or sick, we become increasingly dependent again. Apparently, Jesus sees this as a good thing and a requirement for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. One of the strongest images given for Christians in the Bible is that we are children (and heirs) of God.

Surrendering our lives completely comes with great struggle because it defies the natural order of things. We would much rather cling to everything we can and resist every downward step towards dependence. Dying people face so much anguish because they feel powerless, rejected, abandoned, and increasingly useless. Even Jesus, dying on a cross, suffered this anguish as he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). I

suspect at some level every dying person asks this question, and even if we are not dying the question is familiar to us. We know the emotion of feeling utterly abandoned and lost. Jesus moved from that moment of anguish to a state of surrender. Just before he died, he called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk. 23:46). Not all of us can make that final move to submission.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus told Peter, “Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18). These words of Jesus describe a journey everyone facing a terminal illness knows all too well. The elderly also know this journey intimately. We will all face it, one way or another. As Dave’s ALS progressed, he transitioned from independence to dependence. It began with weakness in his hands and a loss of dexterity in his fingers, so that he needed help to do up the buttons on his shirt (*and someone else will dress you*). Eventually he lost the ability to handle a spoon, knife, or fork (*and someone else will feed you*). And then he began to lose strength in his legs and was confined to a wheelchair (*and someone else will take you where you do not want to go*). Dave needed to be fed, bathed, clothed, and taken to the washroom. He became a little child again.

Many of us experience short episodes of this childlike dependence—times when we are very sick or injured and must rely on our loved ones to feed us, comfort us, and bring us pain medication. We rely on others to escort us to the bathroom or fetch a bedpan. Others prepare our meals and change our sheets. Every one of these experiences reminds us that we are children of God. Every period of dependence, long or short, foreshadows what our dying will be like. Every one is a gift from God moving us to a “divine

dependence”<sup>2</sup> that will ultimately, if we are alert to it, prepare us for a good death.

You’ve likely participated in, or at least heard of, the team-building, trust-enhancing exercise where one member of the team stands with his back to the rest of the team, closes his eyes, relaxes, and simply falls backward. The rest of the team catches the one who falls so he does not hurt himself by crashing unprotected onto the floor. The faller needs to trust his catchers completely. The catchers need to do their jobs well. They demonstrate care and responsibility by how they catch. This is a simple little exercise used by management teams, youth groups, and self-help groups.

In dying, we don’t trust human catchers, we trust the Catcher. In caring for the dying, we say repeatedly, “Don’t be afraid. Remember, God loves you. He will catch you when you take your final fall. Let go and let Him catch you. He will be there. I know you can’t see Him but He will be there. You will fall into Love.”<sup>3</sup>

When our friend Helen first contracted cancer, she decided to live as normally as she could for as long as she could without bitterness or regret. When the cancer came back for the third time, Helen knew her days of normal independence were over. She died in peaceful dependence on God, who had guided her and loved her in life, confident he would guide her and love her in death. She also died in grateful dependence on loving friends and family. I remember the long list of caregivers who volunteered to sit with and serve Helen in her final days. Their presence allowed her to die at home, surrounded by love, treated with great respect. They gave Helen a precious gift, and Helen returned that gift to her friends as she allowed them to fulfill the deeply significant and satisfying role of caregivers. I don’t know if Helen realized how much of a gift her dependent death was to her family and friends.

The family members of the dying also need to discover the gift of dependence. They, too, face great loss and an uncertain

future. In many ways, their path may be harder because it only intensifies after death. When the sick one dies, their struggle ends, but the loss and grief have just begun for those left behind. The journey of the loved ones also moves from independence to dependence, from proving their strength to accepting the reality of their weakness, from frenetic do-gooding to peace-filled rest, from self-sufficiency to emptiness. It is one of the paradoxical promises of the kingdom that dependence on God leads to greater freedom. When we lose our life, we find it. When we take the yoke of Jesus upon us, we find rest. When we know our dependency lies in God and he holds us safely, we acknowledge there is no better place to be, no freer place, no more peaceful place, no more confident place, than in his arms, as a little child might rest in the arms of her mother or father.

Download and listen online your favorite mp3 songs and music by Mercy.Â Mercy - Voodoo Boogie Train. 1.2K. 03:13 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - Wish You Were Here. 1K. 05:37 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - Atchafalaya Bridge. 992. 04:58 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - Meet Me In The Moonlight. 949. 05:20 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy ft.The Sound Man - THE FACTORY. 911. 04:17 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - A Desperate Man. 787. 03:44 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - Duffy Unavailable. 03:42 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - Mercy. 645. 02:46 320 ĘšĎ±/Ń. Mercy - You Got Another Love. 613. Mercy (Middle English, from Anglo-French merci, from Medieval Latin merced-, merces, from Latin, "price paid, wages", from merc-, merxi "merchandise") is benevolence, forgiveness, and kindness in a variety of ethical, religious, social, and legal contexts. In the social and legal context, mercy may refer both to compassionate behavior on the part of those in power (e.g. mercy shown by a judge toward a convict), or on the part of a humanitarian third party, e.g., a mission of mercy aiming to treat war Mercy is a Support hero in Overwatch . Mercyâ€™s Valkyrie Suit helps keep her close to teammates like a guardian angel; healing, resurrecting or strengthening them with the beams emanating from her Caduceus Staff . Regeneration. Type. Passive Ability. Mercy automatically heals over time. Healing : 20 health per second after not taking damage for 1 second. Mercy is an American medical drama television series created by Liz Heldens, which aired on NBC from September 23, 2009, to May 12, 2010. The series initially aired on Wednesday at 8:00 pm (ET), as part of the 2009 fall season, but was pushed back to 9:00 pm in April. On October 23, 2009, Mercy was picked up for a full 22-episode first season. On May 14, 2010, NBC cancelled the series after one season.