

# PRAYERS AND REFLECTIONS AT A TIME OF LOSS

## Walking with grief

Do not hurry as you walk with grief;  
it does not help the journey.

Walk slowly, pausing often;  
do not hurry as you walk with grief.

Be not disturbed by memories  
that come unbidden.  
Swiftly forgive and let Christ  
speak to you unspoken words.  
Unfinished conversation  
will be resolved in him.  
Be not disturbed.

Be gentle with the one  
who walks with grief.  
If it is you, be gentle with yourself.  
Swiftly forgive,  
walk slowly, pausing often.

Take time, be gentle,  
as you walk with grief.

## Words from the Bible:

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord. Those who have faith in me shall live, even though they die; and no one who lives and has faith in me shall ever die. (John 11.25-26 adapted).

The eternal God is your dwelling-place, and underneath are the everlasting arms (Deut. 33.27).

Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you (Ps. 55.22).

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Ps. 46.1).

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt.5.4).

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3.16).

As a mother comforts her child so I will comfort you, says the Lord (Is. 66.13).

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms and he will carry them in his bosom (Is. 40.11).

I heard a voice say: look, God lives among human beings and makes a home among them, they are God's people and God is their God - God with them, God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, there will be no more death and no more mourning or sadness or pain. (Rev. 21.3-4).

Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me. In God's house there are many places to live – if it were otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me, where I am (John 14.1-3).

## Prayers

God who gave us birth, you are ever more ready to hear than we are to pray. You know our needs before we ask, and our ignorance in asking. Show us now your grace, that as we face the mystery of death we may see the light of eternity. Speak to us once more your joyful message of life and of death overcome. Help us to live as those who are prepared to die, and when our days here are ended, enable us to die as those who go forth and live, so that in both living and dying our life may be in Jesus Christ our risen saviour. Amen.

Gracious God, enable us to listen lovingly for your Word. May we console each other with the message you proclaim, so finding light in darkness and faith in the midst of doubt, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of life and love, we come to you in our need. Be with us as we experience the abyss of death and grief. Be there in our sorrow and pain; be with us in our fear, that we may find light in darkness, comfort in your Word; in the name of Jesus, who by death has conquered death. Amen.

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

Risen Jesus, you are there close beside each person, you descent to where we are. And you take upon yourself all that hurts us, both in ourselves and in others. You accompany every human being. More than that, you visit even those who, as non-believers, have died without having been able to know you. And so, in our inner struggle, the contemplation of your forgiveness gives rise to a radiant goodness in the humble heart that allows itself to be led by your Spirit. Amen

Lord, even you know what it's like to feel as if "God is no more", to wonder if what you've staked your whole life on is after all just an illusion. You know what it is like to keep going in the dark by a sheer act of will; to go on loving when there seems to be no response; to abandon oneself to a divine providence one can neither see nor feel, Lord, when it's dark and we can't feel your presence, and nothing seems real any more, and we're tempted to give up trying – help us to know that you are never really absent – that we are like a little child in its mother's arms, held so close to your heart that we cannot see your face, and that underneath are the everlasting arms. Amen.

We remember, Lord, the slenderness of the thread which separates life from death, and the suddenness with which it can be broken. Help us also remember that on both sides of that division that we are surrounded by your love. Persuade our hearts that when our dear one die neither we nor they are parted from you. In you may we find our peace and in you be united with them in the glorious body of Christ, who has burst the bonds of death and is alive for evermore, our saviours and theirs for ever and ever. Amen.

And now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling and lift us from the dark valley of despair to the bright mountain of hope, from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy; to Him be power and authority, for ever and ever. Amen. *Martin Luther King*

Go forth upon thy journey from this world, O Christian soul, in the peace of him in whom thou hast believed, in the name of God the Father, who created thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, who suffered for thee, in the name of the Holy Spirit, who strengthened thee. May angels and archangels, and all the armies of the heavenly host come to meet thee. May thy portion this day be in gladness and peace, thy dwelling in paradise. Go forth upon thy journey, O Christian soul. *Prayer for the dying, from the Roman Ritual.*

## Readings, poems and reflections

What is dying? I am standing on the sea shore. A ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching till she fades on the horizon, and someone at my side says, "She is gone". Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all: she is just as large in the masts, hull, and spars as when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination. The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her, and just at that moment when someone at my side says, "she is gone" there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up a glad shout, "there she comes!" . . . and that is dying. *Bishop Brent*

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity. Death is not extinguishing the light, but putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.  
*Rabindrinath Tagore.*

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them. *Laurence Binyon*

Death does not mean the end of all our striving. Joy does not mean the drying of our tears. Give me, for light, the sunshine of Thy sorrows. Give me, for shelter, the shadow of Thy cross. Give me to share the glory of Thy morrow, gone from my heart the bitterness of loss.

*G.A. Studdart Kennedy*

If I should die and leave you here awhile, be not like others sore, undone, who keep long vigils by the silent dust and weep. For my sake turn again to life and smile, nerving thy heart and trembling hand to do something to comfort other hearts than thine. Complete these dear unfinished tasks of mine, and I, perchance may therein comfort you. *Anon.*

Rest in this, poor heart: God knows  
All thy fears,  
All the questions they impose,  
All the tears.  
Knowing all, He still doth say,  
"Child! Trust in me today".

Res in this, poor heart: God sees  
All thy grief,  
All the fruitless search for ease,  
For relief.  
Seeing all, He still doth say,  
"Child! Trust in me today".

Res in this, poor heart: God hears  
Satan's plea,  
Who by promises or jeers  
Tempteth thee.  
Hearing all, He still doth say,  
"Child! Trust in me today".

Be this the central faith and fact of life: that there is a light beyond our darkness, and a purpose which makes music of our confusion – and we, you and I have some parts in both. Hold fast to that and fear nothing. *Gerald Bullett*

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown". And he replied, "Go out into darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way. May that Almighty hand guide and uphold us all. *Minnie Haskins*

I am afraid of death every time I let myself be seduced by the noisy voices of my world telling me that my “little life” is all that I have, and advising me to cling to it with all my might. But when I let these voices move to the background of my life, and listen to that small soft voice calling me Beloved, then I know there is nothing to fear, and that dying is the greatest act of love – the act that leads me into the eternal embrace of my God whose love is everlasting. *Henri Nouwen*

Death is a formidable foe until we learn to make it a friend. Death is to be feared if we do not learn to welcome it. Death is the ultimate absurdity if we do not see it as fulfilment. Death haunts us when viewed as a journey into nothingness rather than a pilgrimage to a place where true happiness is to be found. The human minds cannot understand death. We face it with fear and uncertainty, revulsion even; or we turn away from the thought for it is too hard to bear. But faith gives answers when reason fails. The strong instinct to live points to immortality. Faith admits us into death’s secrets. Death is not the end of the road, but a gateway to a better place. It is in this place that our noblest aspirations will be realised. It is here that we will understand how our experience of goodness, love, beauty and joy are realities which exist perfectly in God. It is in heaven that we shall rest in him and our hearts will be restless until they rest in God. We, left to continue our pilgrimage through life, weep and mourn. Sadness reigns in our hearts. Our tears will not be bitter ones now but a gentle weeping to rob our sadness of its agony and lead at last to peace, peace with God. *Cardinal Basil Hume.*

Hands who touched the leper, touch my wounded heart;  
Hands who healed the blind man, heal my aching soul;  
Hands who cured the lame, mend my disjointed life;  
Hands who embraced all life, enfold me in your peace.  
Lord, simply touch and heal, cure and forgive.  
*Giles Harcourt*

### **A prayer to read alone or with others:**

All our laughter, all our sadness safe now in God’s hands.  
All our anger, all our gladness safe now in God’s hands.  
All our stories, all our memories safe now in God’s hands.  
Those we remember, those we love safe now in God’s hands.

[Pause for reflection, memories, maybe some shared music . . .]

We ask for the love of God and the messages of Angels,  
The presence of Jesus and the prayers of his people,  
The power of the Spirit and the strong hands of friends,  
To bless us on life’s journey, and lead us safely home.  
Amen *Ruth Burgess*

### **Anonymous poem from the Queen Mother’s funeral 2002**

You can shed tears that s/he is gone  
or you smile because s/he has lived.  
You can close your eyes and pray that s/he’ll come back  
or you can open your eyes and see all s/he’s left.  
Your heart can be empty because you can’t see her/him  
or you can be full of the love you shared.  
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday  
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.  
You can remember her/him and only that s/he’s gone  
or you can cherish her/his memory and let it live on.  
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back,  
or you can do what s/he’d want:  
smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

This booklet has been prepared because we are often asked for poems and reflections on loss and bereavement. If you would like to talk to a member of the clergy, please contact [robert.morgan@theology.ox.ac.uk](mailto:robert.morgan@theology.ox.ac.uk) (01865 748848)