

“Terminally Ill” – A Message of Hope Dedicated to our brother and strong warrior in Christ – Greg Murtha

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[Update: I originally wrote and posted this lesson in February 2016. Greg went Home to be with our Lord last night. I was with him last week and walked with him out of VUMC as they released him (again). He became ill again very soon and was re-hospitalized. Last night, he awakened in the waiting, loving arms of our precious Savior, Whom Greg loved so much. A mighty soldier of the Cross, who fought, long and hard, and represented Christ so well, now finally Home—at rest and peace. He left behind a powerful legacy—not of who he was, but Whose he is.

In Greg’s honor, I edited the original lesson, where appropriate, and am sending it to you because Greg agreed and wanted all to know that we are “terminally ill”—in desperate need of the Savior he knows so well, and in Whose presence, his spirit now resides.]

This lesson stirred in my spirit for a long time. To be honest, the title scared me. *Terminally ill* elicits personal, raw emotions for many. I had to be certain I could approach this in a way that communicated truth with big doses of compassion and concern. Greg’s blessing and encouragement to write this lesson provided final confirmation. *As Greg put it, these words “need to be received by many, if not all.”*

Though I spent most of my adult life in healthcare, I was never directly involved in areas associated with terminal illness. Like

many of you, I have walked through it with family and friends. Whether by routine exam or symptomatic changes, the process typically goes something like this.

- **DIAGNOSIS – Anxiety or Relief.** When we receive a good diagnosis, we are glad and relieved. When we receive one we hoped or prayed against, reactions differ. Some seek second opinions. Others are numbed and not sure how to process the information. Still others fall into denial, despondency, or depression. Bad news is hard to take—the truth often hard to accept.
- **DISEASE.** Given the diagnosis we did not want, reality of a sickness that could render us *terminally ill* sets in as doctors propose a treatment regimen. Again, reactions differ. Some face this process with great courage—eager to fight for their lives. Others are overcome with fear and trepidation, knowing the treatments often have significant side-effects. We may think ahead to the reality of what happens if the treatments do not bring about the cure we seek. That leads us to the third, and final, part...
- **DEATH.** Not many sit around contemplating our passing. Yet it remains the one common denominator of all people. I assume all reading this have attended or been part of a funeral or memorial service. Most of them mourn the loss and try to find something good to say about the deceased. Some celebrate his or her 'good' life. But when the service is over, two people remain: the hopeless and the hopeful. We are going to examine the differences.

In the few weeks since you received the January lesson, *In the Beginning God*, I had the wonderful opportunity to spend precious time with my friend, Greg Murtha, who has very advanced cancer. Our time together was more of a reunion. We lost touch over the last few years. The only news I heard was that he had been diagnosed with an advanced stage of cancer. We met over lunch and caught up on life, families, and, most importantly, his battle with cancer that put him

in the dreaded category– ***terminally ill***.

At the time I wrote the original version of this lesson, Greg had endured fifty radiation and chemo treatments. He ultimately had around seventy-five. Throughout, I have never seen anyone handle this kind of adversity with such amazing grace and a demeanor reserved for **someone walking closely with our Lord, *living in the present of His presence***.

- **God turns bad news into Good News—the hopeless into the hopeful.**

Bad News. Death is certain—the contract with a no “escape” clause.

Despite your clean bill of health, stellar physical fitness, and positive outlook on life, I have bad news. You are terminally ill. We all are. 100% of all people die at some point. We are going to examine what the Bible says about our death, both of them. I will explain ‘both’ as well. For most readers, these words are not new nor are you reading them for the first time, perhaps just the *right time!*

Physical Death

Unless the rapture of the Church takes place in our lifetime or God translates us straight to Heaven as He did Enoch and Elijah, we are going to die physically. Jesus died a physical death. Most people do not believe the biblical path to physical death as told in Genesis 3, but they know the story. Christians refer to the sin of Adam and Eve as the *fall of man*. It could also be called the *death of mankind*. For reference, here is a link to a video teaching time that discusses this in more detail. (From the Cradle to the Cross)

Genesis 3 teaches us that ***sin*** makes everyone *terminally ill*. We are all guilty of sin, although most people do not like to talk about it or hear they are ‘sinners’. “That sounds so negative.” It is! It’s deadly. The Apostle Paul said it this way,

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Romans 5:12

You do not have to be a theologian to understand that verse. That is bad news, and it gets worse before we get to the message of Hope people are *desperate* to hear. Many ask how it can get worse after death. That does not make any sense UNLESS there is something after death more foreboding than death itself. The writer of Hebrews added a phrase to what Paul said that troubles the hearts of men to our core.

"...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment," (from Hebrews 9:27)

That phrase and the use of the word *judgment* absolutely sets off unbelievers from every religion or credo outside biblical Christianity. As Christians, we are more often accused of being "judgmental" than any other verbal assault. The fact that we hold fast to the truths of the Bible and salvation in Christ alone (John 14:6) is offensive to those who walk in darkness, blinded to the Truth. The Apostle Paul pointed that out.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (I Corinthians 1: 18)

[For more detail, you can read about the **two** judgments in 2 Corinthians 5 and Revelation 20.]

Spiritual Death (from bad to worst)

In the verse from Hebrews, God confirms there is *life after death*, i.e., physical death is not the end. Many religions teach that. *Reincarnation. All good people go to heaven. Our spirits wander around the earth doing whatever.* Many religions-many beliefs. One Truth. The Bible teaches sin not only caused *physical* death, it also brought about *spiritual* death. Jesus' ominous words of warning speak directly and clearly.

*"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather **fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**"* (Matthew 10:28)

Jesus went further than teaching there is *life after death* and

judgment. He interjected an even bigger issue for those who disdain Christianity: Hell. Real place, fire, eternal suffering. This is what is meant by *spiritual death*. Those who experience this death never lose consciousness of their surroundings. It is beyond horrific and unimaginable—the reasons Jesus spoke so much about it. Because He loves us, He warned people of the reality of its existence. Unfortunately, for the lost person, the easiest way around judgment and hell is simply to reject it as false teaching. Call it a lie and today it is. Right?

GOOD NEWS. Finally we get to the good part. Now we will see how Jesus planned to deal with death and give us *hope*. He did not stop with those foreboding words of Hell and judgment. Jesus said “*He came to save sinners.*” (Mark 2: 17). ***Jesus offered a way out – an escape clause from a binding terminal contract.***

Jesus’ death for our sins provided complete payment; restitution to Holy God Who demanded the death penalty for our sins. This was the ultimate Gift, offered to all who acknowledge we are *terminally ill (sin)*, repent, and receive His Gift of salvation. Yet most people rejected Him then, and most still do.

Sadly, a gift is only a gift if the one to whom it is offered accepts it. ***So many terminally ill people walk away because they do not like “the terms of the deal.”*** They remain determined to find an easier path or continue to call the Truth a lie, unaware they have been deceived by the ultimate liar, Satan. He deceived Eve then Adam. He worked hard to deceive Jesus Himself. Only an arrogant man or fool would believe Satan does not come after us, or we are too smart to be deceived.

HOPE. For Christians, physical death is just the beginning. While physical death is certain, so is life after death. We will experience the same resurrection as Jesus. *Spiritual life* for Christians is eternal life spent in the presence of God, occupying one of the *mansions* in Heaven Jesus said He was going to prepare for us—the amazing place John tried to describe in Revelation. Consider the words of Apostle Peter.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* (I Peter 1: 3)

Christians have victory over death. That gives us **living hope**. Unbelievers search for a hope that better fits their lifestyles; something comfortable and convenient. Death is neither, but it is inevitable. During His life, Jesus offered hope to hopeless captives, the Jews. His offer stands today. He is the only hope for all who are *terminally ill*, physically and spiritually.

How should we put a wrap on this lesson? I assume we agree 100% of all men die, including us. So let me close by asking three pivotal questions.

1. How much longer do you have to live?

“Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come.” (Ecclesiastes 9: 12)

Solomon wrote this answer that has troubled the hearts of men since Adam was escorted from the Garden. **“I don’t know.”** We do not know *how or when*. *“Live like there is no tomorrow”* is both a secular mantra and biblical mandate. The difference in those lives is HOPE.

2. Have you accepted the Gift that alone can cure your terminal illness?

*“Surely He (Jesus) bore our pain and suffering...He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds **we are healed**. We have all, like sheep, gone astray...and **the LORD laid on Him all of our sins.**”* (Isaiah 53: 4-6)

A matter of life and death. If you have not settled this once and for all time, I implore you. Please do so right now. We just agreed death is inevitable and the time unknown. God loves you and is waiting.

3. If you have been made alive in Christ, are you living a HOPE-FULL or hopeless life?

*“Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to **give the reason for the hope that you have** with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3: 15)*

God is faithful in life and death. Then why do so many Christians live as the hopeless? We were made alive forever in Christ. Our living Hope should produce in our lives the fruits of the Spirit, beginning with love for others, especially the lost. People are attracted to the Living Christ in us. Our hope gives them hope. I want to live like that. I hope you do too!

Walter