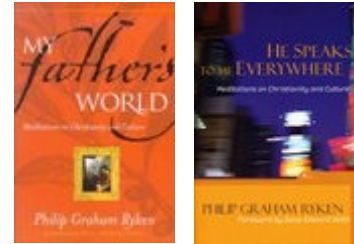


Window on the World

Window on the World is our weekly opportunity to examine our culture from the vantage point of biblical Christianity. Here you will find the text from Dr. Ryken's "Window on the World" talks from Tenth Presbyterian Church's evening service. If you missed one or wanted to send a copy to a friend, you will be able to find them here. Please note: there is no "Window on the World" on third Sundays, selected other Sundays, or in July and August.

Windows on the World before September 2005 are available in an older format. [Click here](#). Many of these are now published in [My Father's World: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2002) and in [He Speaks to Me Everywhere: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2004) by Philip Graham Ryken.



Dying Well

Dr. Philip Ryken



Series:

General

Date:

6/4/2006

Full Text:

Shortly after the death of my father-in-law, I had the opportunity to thank his pastor for the spiritual care he received from the church in his last days of life on this earth. I will always remember the words of encouragement the pastor gave me. "Jim Maxwell died well," he said, before adding, "Not everyone does, you know."

No, not everyone dies well, but only those who are strong in faith, bold in courage, and well prepared to meet their God. The Puritan Edmund Barker said, "Every Christian hath two great works to do in the world, to live well, and to die well." This is one of my own spiritual ambitions: to be ready to die when the time comes, and to die well. It is never too early to start preparing for something as important as dying well. So what are some practical ways to get better prepared for the last moments we have on earth before our first moments in eternity?

We can prepare to die well by thinking often about death and the life to come. This is what Moses was doing when he prayed, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). This is always the way to prepare for things we know we have to face in the future. By thinking clearly and soberly about what lies ahead, we are better prepared to handle it with dignity and grace when the time comes. We should think about the moment of death itself, when we will have to say farewell to everything we have in this life, and also about what comes after death, when every believer will be "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). And we should think about these things often. Charles Spurgeon said: "We are flying, as on some mighty eagle's wing, swiftly on towards eternity. Let us, then, talk about preparing to die. It is the greatest thing we have to do, and we have soon to do it, so let us talk and think something about it."

If it is good for us to talk and think about death, we will do well to learn what the Bible says on the subject. "We must all die," the Scripture says; "we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Sam. 14:14). The Bible also gives us many examples of people who died well—people like Jacob, who blessed his

children (see Gen. 49), or like Joshua, who in his dying days spoke words of spiritual wisdom for the people of God (see Josh. 24). But the best example of all is our Lord Jesus himself, who in his dying hours was setting an example for us by meditating on Scripture (see Matt. 27:46; cf. Ps. 22:1), by forgiving his enemies (see Luke 23:34), by sharing the gospel (see Luke 23:39-43), by caring for his family (see John 19:26-27), and by entrusting his body and his soul to his Father in heaven (see Luke 23:46).

We can prepare to die well by paying close attention to the spiritual experience of others in death and grief. As we watch our loved ones suffer, we should consider whether they are dying well. If they are not, we should consider why not, but if they are, we should consider what we can learn from the example of their faith. We can learn similar lessons when we attend funerals or go to graveside burial services. The brothers and sisters who go before us—including the ones we read about in good Christian biographies—are teaching us how to die.

Then we can prepare to die well by singing great hymns and meditating on their meaning. Many of the best hymns touch in one way or another on the believer's faith for the hour of death. As a preacher, one of my favorites is "There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood," which partly goes like this:

Ee'r since by faith I saw the stream
Your flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.
Then in a nobler, sweeter song
I'll sing your pow'r to save,
When this poor lisp'ing, stamm'ring tongue
Lies silent in the grave.

But there are many good hymns for getting ready to die, like "Abide with Me," "Rock of Ages," "The Lord's My Shepherd," "Amazing Grace." Or consider the closing stanza of "My Faith Looks Up to Thee":

When ends life's transient dream,
When death's cold, sullen stream
Shall o'er me roll,
Blest Savior, then, in love,
Fear and distrust remove;
O bear me safe above,
A ransomed soul.

The words of that hymn are really a prayer, which is yet another way we can prepare well for death: by praying for the grace we need even before the time comes for us to die. Like any other future difficulty, we should take our coming death to the Lord in prayer. We should pray like this: "In my dying hour, Lord, help me to hold on to you by faith, and let the people I love see your grace in me."

There are many other things we can do to get ready for our dying day. We can exercise good stewardship of our earthly possessions, preparing to leave a legacy that provides for our families and advances the kingdom of God. We can reconcile broken relationships so as not to leave any unfinished interpersonal business behind. We can also practice daily self-denial—sacrificing our selves for the sake of others, like Jesus did. If we are putting ourselves to death every day (see Col. 3:5), then the day of death itself will turn out to be the day we have been preparing for all our lives.

But of course the most important thing we can do to prepare to die well is to put our faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins on the cross, and who passed from death to everlasting life in his resurrection. If you trust in Jesus, your salvation is secure. Death has lost its sting for you (1 Cor. 15:55), and your Savior will be with you in your dying hour. After that, he will take you to his Father's house—the place you have been longing to go all your life.

Then when it is time for you to die, the only thing you will have to do is to die, and to die as well as you can. Everything else is already arranged.