



HERS OPINION HIS



Understanding And Accepting Death

BY VICKIE L. HUGHES

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die, Believeth thou this? John 11:25-26.

What does death mean to you? to me it means saying goodbye to someone we will never see again... Or do we see them again? Only God knows. A few weeks ago, I received a message on my answering machine. I heard the words, "Your grandfather is not expected to live through the night." He didn't. I got the final call early the next morning. As I prepared to travel to Nashville, Tennessee for the funeral, I felt joy and sadness at the same time. I felt joy because my grandfather had lived a long, full life. He was 90 years old. I felt joy because my grandfathers suffering was over-he died of cancer and at his age, doctors could do very little to ease the pain. I felt sadness because a part of my family was gone. I felt sadness because I would never see my paternal grandfather again. May you rest in peace, Grandfather. I will always remember Adam H. Hughes. One day we shall meet again.

Deaths are categorized in two ways.

They are either expected deaths or unexpected deaths. Expected deaths are often accompanied by the five stages of death outlined by Elisabeth Kubler in her book, *On Death and Dying*.

The first stage, denial, is a temporary defense mechanism. A person has been told that they are dying and they deny the fact that this is happening to them. Anger then follows which causes the person to displace their feelings in all different directions. The person feels anger towards God and others. He/she is angry because he/she no longer feels in control. Next, the person attempts to postpone death through bargaining. The person bargains with God by offering to change something in his/her life in exchange for a prolonged life. The fourth stage is depression. During this stage, the person feels sadness and guilt over leaving loved ones behind. Finally, the person experiences a stage of acceptance. The person has accepted that his/her death is inevitable and starts to prepare for death. The family of a terminally ill person experiences the five stages of death also. However, when the person eventually dies, the family members often feel relief because the person is no longer suffering.

Unexpected deaths strike people of

all ages. Unexpected deaths come in the forms of car accidents, drowning accidents, suicide, crib deaths, heart attacks, or unexplained causes. When the deceased person is under thirty-five years of age, it seems that the loved ones left behind feel that the person was not given a chance to live a full life. I believe that God had a better plan for them.

Unexpected deaths often trigger feelings of guilt by loved ones left behind. Loved ones may feel that they are responsible for the accident or cause of death. Many times the person(s) feeling guilty may or may not have been present but he/she feels guilty anyway.

Some individuals feel guilty because they did not express love towards the deceased shortly before death occurred. I feel that a day should not go by without telling a loved one, "I love you." We never know when a person will be taken away from us and then it's too late to say anything. Some people never work out the guilt they feel as a result of this and they harbor these guilt feelings for years. Death affects people in different ways. A death of a loved one can bring family members closer or it can tear them apart. People often resort to drugs and/or alcohol to get them through each day emotionally as they grieve. Others withdraw from family members and friends and try to handle grief alone instead of seeking comfort through others. They also may take out their anger over the death of a loved one on other individuals by inflicting psychological or physical pain. Family members may be drawn closer to each other when one family member is lost because they realize that time is precious and that they may soon lose another.

If you know someone who has recently lost a loved one, take the initiative to comfort that person. Help with everyday concerns. Recommend self-help groups. Be supportive during expressions of guilt feelings. Give the person enough time to grieve. Do not deny the deceased person's past existence. Comfort from others is the most important aspect of the grieving process.

Although many of us have not lost a loved one and do not understand death, we must try to understand it. Death is a known part of life's cycle. God expects us to prepare for death every day of our lives. Everytime we attend church or read the Bible, we are constantly reminded to prepare for death by living a clean, productive life. We are all going to die one day. Let's make the most of our time on earth and treasure time spent with our loved ones.

DEATH CREPT UPON US

Death crept upon us
It actually took one of us.
So young, so new,
Why Him?
I'm sure, you have a purpose.
I know it's a good one.
Death crept upon us,
His face-so cold, so pale.
I waited for it to move,
To show signs of life of living.
As the coffin was closed
I wanted to shout, "Come back!"
I cried a tear for Gerald,
I cried a tear for life.
Death had indeed crept upon us.
-Vickie L. Hughes (1985)

This poem was written about a co-worker who was eighteen years old and died shortly after a car accident.



Travel: Robert Butler

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

problems. Portland School District, Tri-Met, etc...I can name them all. They sit in Board rooms and discuss what they want from the mega agencies or their requirements and I can't even get in to compete. They slam the door on you right there...the bulk of our volume comes from small commercial accounts and some loyal customers. We have a good following. We have excellent services and I wish more people would take advantage of us."

BY ULLYSSES TUCKER, JR.

"You would know the secret of death. But how shall you find it unless you seek in the heart of life? The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light. If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life. For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one." Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, 1923.

Death is a phenomenon that people must learn to accept and understand because it is a fact of life. Sometimes, people are caught off guard by the events surrounding death and other times it is easy to anticipate. Why people attempt to justify, rationalize, or question death is beyond my comprehension. I believe that the death of a friend or loved one forces people to put their lives in perspective or give up certain lifestyles/habits. People can learn a great deal from death if they study the life of the person who died. Of a drug dealer dies, a person who is perceived to be an enemy to the community, most people could care less. Some will say that he/she deserved to die or had no respect for human life. On the other hand, if an outstanding social activist/educator with 30 years of outstanding service dies, people conclude that he/she didn't deserve to die because they were good for the community, regardless of ones lifestyle, values, morals, or level of respect for the community, no one deserves to die. However, we all must meet our maker. Flowers, plants, and animals die, so, people should be no exception.

My first encounter with death, outside of watching it happen on the streets of Washington, D.C. and on television, came when my grandfather died. I was in fifth grade at the time. All of my television heroes came back time and time again, but I started asking questions when my grandfather did not come back. Adults should not "sugarcoat" the truth when it comes to explaining death to younger children or young relatives. It only adds confusion. "Daddy's sleeping" and "She's gone bye-bye" must be re-

placed with the truth.

Death really hit home a few years later when my father died. He was shot to death by his girlfriends' boyfriend at her apartment, two blocks from where we lived. I had a difficult time, at age 13,

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accepting the circumstances of his death because we had our first real father to son talk the night he was shot. I felt betrayed by my father and God because he did not have to go to her apartment that night. He could have gone to a party with my uncle (his brother) or to the movies with my aunts. My father had already seen the movie and he never called my uncle. Can it be they see their death coming? Is it God's will that people walk to their death knowingly? Time and time again, I've watched couples who have been together a very long time die shortly after their mate does. There has to be more to death than meets the eye. Continuing, I became a very violent, angry, and bitter individual after my father was killed. I took it out on my schoolmates, family members and community. I cursed God for treating me so bad and for taking my father away from me. With this anger still in tack, my mother died a little over a year later and this did not help my disposition one bit. I was a very confused youngster and I could not understand why God was again, treating me so bad. My mother suffered from cancer and after my father died, she lost her will to survive. All she would talk about during visits were (all whom were dead) the people who came by to visit her room. It was very scary. To complicate matters, family members accused me of

driving my mother to her grave with my behavior patterns and criminal activity. Imagine how I felt as a 14 year old? To be accused of such an act left me with guilt and very sensitive about this issue. For a long period of time, I felt responsible for killing my mother and today I fault my relatives for placing such a heavy burden on my shoulders. As I got older, I learned that my mother failed to treat her cancer before it got out of hand and this contributed more to her death than my behavior. Still, I felt guilty and responsible. Both of my parents went to their grave with a terrible perception of me. My drive as a professional is partly attributed to them because I had to prove to them (in my own mind) that I could be a decent person. I just know that they would be proud of me now. I believe that in my heart.

I would encourage people not to blame someone for contributing to the death of another unless they are physically responsible, especially to a child with low self-esteem or a fragile ego. I was fortunate enough to overcome such harsh words. Most children are not that strong or equipped emotionally to handle such drama. Over the years, I've learned that is not the amount of years you've spent on this earth, it is about the quality of life and how you treat people while you are on this physical plane. I would much rather live thirty-five quality years than to be locked up in jail until the age of seventy.

Experts define "poltergeist" as the negative energy that exist in the world or those vibrations created by people who do not accept their death or walking to the light when its time. If you died today, could you accept walking to the light or would you fight death? When you see a person looking very peaceful in a casket, it is said that they accepted death and walked to the light. Angry or mad expressions indicate that people fought death or died abruptly, resulting in never energy or "poltergeist" (negative energy). I'm happy to say that I am at peace with myself and if I died today, I would be pleased with my accomplishments/life. Would you be happy or is there much more that you would like to do? Then make use of the time you have left.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

In your last issue (8/3/90) there appeared an article entitled, "Expressing Yourself As A Christian". In general, it had many good points to make regarding with regard to our warfare against materialism. Since this article was actually an excerpt from a recent book, I could not expect your religion editor to have corrected some glaring errors in it. I hope, after the fact, though, that I can point out those erroneous statements.

The article said: "...the Roman Catholic Church...claims there is no salvation outside their circle..." The Catholic Church has never taught this. In fact, it is a matter of history that an American priest was excommunicated for taking precisely this position! What the Catholic Church does teach on this matter can be found clearly stated in the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council. In its document on "The Church", issued in 1964, the Council declared that the Catholic Church has a very real relationship with all other people bearing the name of "Christian". The basis for that real relationship is the Holy Spirit which is at work sanctifying ALL "Christians". In fact, the Catholic Church teaches, through this latest Council, that salvation extends to many others:

"Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience--those, too, may achieve eternal salvation." (Chapter II, #16)

The article continues: "...the Roman Catholic Church...bans its members from attending other denominational services." Again, there was never a "ban" as such, but there definitely was an atmosphere of distrust, but all of this is disappearing under the influence of the Second Vatican Council's teachings, which Catholics believe were inspired by the Spirit!

Finally, the article states: "...the Roman Catholic Church...maintains domination above it (the state government)..." This is not true; the Catholic Church, in 1965, stated in its document, "The Church in the Modern World" (Chapter IV, #76): The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields."
Walter Stichert

PERSPECTIVES

By Professor McKinley Burt



What Are The Prospects For Blacks in Rural Northwest?

It's rather hard to say, isn't it? If past experience is any indicator, I would say that the answer is 70% positive. This proceeds both from my personal experience over the years and from numerous visits and interviews with African American workers and business operators in rural areas of Oregon and Washington. Of course you'll find that a good personality and good skills make the difference.

The July 25 Perspectives article ("Loggers are Hurting, Too") detailed some positive personal experiences of my own--primarily representing a major governmental agency, the U.S. Forest Service. But what about the Black "on his own"? The experiences I cited were 100% positive and, actually, even though this agency's "Affirmative Action" sessions were initially provocative and viewed with suspicion, the "rural" responses soon turned favorable with very few exceptions. Let us look at a historical pattern, for many of the African Americans living in this metropolitan area have not the slightest idea of life in these other environs--except for a few negative commentaries they've heard.

When I came to the Northwest for the first time in the late 1930s as a teenage high school dropout, it was to work in various parts of rural Oregon, Washington and Idaho as a laborer on railroad "extra gangs". Even that "late" there were remnants of scattered settlements of Blacks in rural areas. In Idaho I found a group of Black wheat farmers near Lewiston. Not too far away were surviving family members of coal miners who had come up from Alabama at the turn of the century to work in the

"Fourth of July Canyon" mines. In both cases the younger generations married into the white communities--or for the most part migrated to the larger cities of the Pacific coast.

In the state of Washington there were similar encounters. On the Snake River near the Idaho border there was the town of Riparia, Washington where around World War I (1917) a Black Pullman porter on the Seattle run had been stranded when huge snow drifts blocked the main line. Fascinated by the new perspectives and promises of the area, he returned to Chicago to bring his family out and went to work as a ranch hand. When I got to the town in 1939, he had retired--but admiring residents recounted how through the years he had worked up to rancher and businessman, holding at various times the offices of Grange Master and Mayor. In this case too the generations had either married into the community or gone off to the big cities.

These were common experiences, too numerous to mention--when whites would bring their small children down to the railroad crossings where we Black laborers were working. They would point at us and exclaim, "THERE'S ONE!" Most small children in many of these small communities had never seen an African American except in books or magazines. However, in many other small towns, one would encounter all sorts of craftsmen and entrepreneurs: barbers, blacksmiths, agricultural workers, harvest laborers, loggers, farmers, ferry boat operators, bridge tenders, cowboys, mechanics, and operators of hardware stores, groceries, gas stations, garages, and other enterprises.

On my second round of experiences--we'll call this the current era in which we are interested here--I found many innovative Blacks who have made the most of opportunities often unique to rural areas. In Spokane, Washington during the 1970s I met Cliff Ritchie operator of a HELICOPTER SERVICE

who contracted for tree spraying with the U.S. Forest Service and for crop dusting with the sugar beet growers. His father operated the largest Ford garage in the community and the son on returning from the air force BUILT THE FIRST HELICOPTER FROM MIXED PARTS BOUGHT FROM A SURPLUS DEALER IN LOS ANGELES.

In Oregon the experiences of African Americans in the rural areas are extremely interesting, especially in light of the following. During the 1970s, I devised a number of Work Study and Cooperative Education Programs for the U.S. Forest Service and many students in my classes at Portland State University participated, minority and white. For many of the minorities those first assignments to rural areas proved to be a traumatic experience--especially the African Americans. In most cases these cultural problems were resolved, some of the encounters having some rather comic overtures: "Get me another job. I can't stand that hillbilly music on the radio and on the jukeboxes in those 'honky joints'! This big redhead dude grabbed me at the dance and almost broke my bones with that wild stompin' those folks do. My mother told me never to sleep in no house with white folks."

All in all it was the Blacks raised in the south who made the easiest adjustment. This follows a pattern, for I noticed during my work with the U.S. Forest Service that in most cases the spouses of African Americans hired by this agency and were from the south found ready employment in even the most remote areas. Also, they readily entered the cultural matrix of the community. For instance, in the Roseburg area the wife of the African American soil scientist for the agency was hired as director of the area's largest childcare center. Both were active members of and held high lay positions in the community's largest church.

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