



“HOW SHALL I LIVE, KNOWING THAT I WILL DIE?”

Produced by The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
under “Theological Education for the Laity.”

GETTING STARTED

Most people are a bit reluctant to talk about “death.” To assist pastors and congregations, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia offers “How Shall I Live, Knowing That I Will Die?” as a theological study resource for laity.

Lent, of course, is a very appropriate time to approach this topic. However, because our denial of death is so broad-reaching, this study can be useful at any time of the year.

THE TOPIC: “HOW SHALL I LIVE, KNOWING THAT I WILL DIE?”

The crisis in health care delivery, rising health care costs, advances in medical technology, longer life spans, etc. are confronting people with new and demanding issues about living and dying.

In August 2003, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopted a new social statement, “Health Care: Our Shared Endeavor,” outlining some of the significant ways that congregations can be partners in this shared endeavor. This statement is available from the ELCA on [www.elca.org/dcs].

Over the years, the church’s perspective about “death” has not always been clear. The new social statement by the ELCA provides some helpful clarity.

Furthermore, ongoing biblical and theological confusion exists in the minds of many persons about their understanding of “death.” This confusion results in a misunderstanding about the good news of the “resurrection.”

Congregations today have a new opportunity to assist people of all ages with their stewardship of life and death. How are we to use this gracious gift of life? How can Christians prepare for death? This study will assist people in making decisions about what they can do today, knowing that one day they will die.

Participants in the study will have opportunity to:

- Talk about death and resurrection from a biblical perspective,
- Identify steps each person can take now, knowing that death is a reality,
- Work on things that the congregation can do to help people with issues related to life and death.

A quote from the best seller, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, sums up this topic in nine poignant words – “Once you know how to die, you learn how to live.”



THE AUDIENCE AND USES

“How Shall I Live, Knowing That I Will Die?” is a theological resource for laity. It is for all the people of God and for all ages. Possible uses include:

- Lenten Soup and Study sessions
- As background for meditations within Lenten mid-week services
- Lenten breakfast studies
- Adult and youth forums
- Women’s or men’s groups
- Confirmation classes
- Retreats
- Advent Study groups, etc.

The benefit of a Reproducible Study is that you can make as many copies of the Participant Worksheets as needed, so that each person has a copy. Thus, this study may be used many times and with a variety of audiences.

THE COLLECTION OF MATERIALS

“How Shall I Live, Knowing That I Will Die?” is a rich collection of materials and resources. Much of the information can be useful outside of the study.

- **Images for Lent** — information that can assist in your planning/promotion,
- **Teacher’s Guides** — information for the person(s) leading each session. Included is an overview of the theme, specific teaching suggestions and background materials for each of the five sessions.
- **Participant Worksheets** — master copies of the five reproducible Participant Worksheets (Study Guides) for each of the five sessions. You will print copies of the Participant Worksheets so that each person has a copy.
- **Additional Resources:**
 - *Let’s Talk About Death* — a background article noting the ambiguities in our language about death.
 - *A Guide for Funeral Preparations* and *A Guide for Preparation of Death Announcement* — a form for use in congregations.
 - *Disciples: Who Are They and What Do They Do?* — a background article on the meaning of discipleship today.
- **Evaluations and Suggestions** — a form on which the leader and all participants can return comments and suggestions.

THE AUTHOR AS RESOURCE

If you, or your group, have a particular question, you may e-mail the author of this study [gkeck@Ltsp.edu].



TEACHER'S GUIDE

“HOW SHALL I LIVE, KNOWING THAT I WILL DIE?”

Thank you for serving as leader for “How Shall I Live, Knowing That I Will Die?”

GETTING READY TO LEAD

Our “denial of death” is one of the most pervasive issues before us today. The last century produced massive changes in “how, when, and where” we die. But people are sometimes hesitant to talk about these life and death issues. The result is that we cut ourselves off from the greatest gifts that God gives to us – the Good News of the Gospel and the support of the Body of Christ. If we can’t talk to our brothers and sisters in Christ about issues related to living and dying, then where can we talk?

Therefore, you have the important role of inviting people to explore the topic of “How Shall I Live, Knowing That I Will Die?”

Your role will be to:

- Create a “caring atmosphere” where participants can explore this topic from a biblical perspective.
- Create a “safe place” where people can share their values about health care and their thoughts about death.
- Move the discussion through the steps on the Participant Worksheet, to guide the comments, to provide additional information as appropriate.

YOU HAVE RESOURCES AS A TEACHER

This “Teacher’s Guide” will provide you step-by-step suggestions for each of the five sessions.

However, you have even more help within the variety of other resources included within this material. Take time to read and review the following:

- *Images of Lent* [Getting Started section]
- *Let’s Talk About Death* [Additional Resource section]
- *A Guide to Funeral Preparations and Death Announcements* [Additional Resource section]
- *Disciples: Who Are They and What do They Do?* [Additional Resource section]

There are four other resources that are not included but could be helpful and that you may wish to use as general background, especially if you are uncomfortable in defining some of the current health care terminology or explaining the church’s position on cremation and organ donation. Or you may wish to encourage their use after the study is completed.

- *On Our Own Terms: Moyers on Dying - Glossary* - Here you will find terms and helpful definitions. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/onourown/terms/glossary.html>
- *What about Organ Donation and Cremation?* - Here you will find two brief statements prepared by the worship staff of the ELCA. http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/faq/funerals/donation_cremation.html
- *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life’s Greatest Lesson* by Mitch Albom – Available at your local library or book supplier
- *Step by Step: Your Guide to Making Practical Decisions When a Loved One Dies* — a useful booklet provided by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Information on how to obtain this resource is available at the Thrivent Financial for Lutherans website at <http://www.thrivent.com/planning/lifeevents/legacy/index.html>



PREPARING TO LEAD "HOW SHALL I LIVE, KNOWING THAT I WILL DIE?"

For all five sessions you will need to:

- Arrange for a comfortable space, preferably with tables and chairs, where participants may speak openly.
- Have newsprint or white board for noting key items during the discussion.
- Make copies of the Participant Worksheet and other handouts for all participants.
- Encourage participants to bring a folder or notebook. This will provide a place to keep the Participant Worksheets and other resources you make available.
- Make sure you have pencils, Bibles, and extra paper on hand.

FORMAT FOR THE STUDY SESSIONS

The format and flow in each session are much the same. The material in the Teacher's Guide and in the Participant Worksheet follow the same sequence. You will find that the Participant Worksheet also provides information to guide the discussion. Thus, there is no expectation that you must present everything or lecture.

Your role is to move the group through the items on Participant Worksheet, to provide additional information as appropriate, and to facilitate discussion within the time frame.

- Each session begins with Introductions, Gathering Prayer, Review of what has gone before, and the Focus for the session.
- Each session includes several (three to five) statements or questions for general discussion and/or Bible study.
- Each session concludes with a Summary, Closing Prayer, and Assignments for the next session.

MY THANKS TO YOU

Thank you for taking on this important role. If necessary, I am available as a resource. Send me your questions via email [gkeck@Ltsp.edu], and I will try to respond promptly.

Your partner in the Gospel – George E. Keck