

Editorial: Give an important end-of-life gift

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Losing a loved one is really hard, even in the best of circumstances. And how often is a loved one's dying accompanied by the best of circumstances?

As I write, we have brought my father-in-law home from the hospital, where he was for a little more than two weeks dealing with the effects of prolonged chemotherapy. After battling pancreatic cancer since 2021, with about a year reprieve, he has begun hospice. So, not entirely the best of circumstances.

There are bright spots, however. One of those are the heart-to-heart conversations we've been able to have over the last couple of weeks. Another is his committed faith in Jesus. And still another are the visits and kind words from friends and family old and new.

A particular bright spot is the gift he and my mother-in-law gave us—their family—by taking care of their affairs years ago. If you follow their example, you will give a great and important end-of-life gift to your loved ones.

Don't wait

I have firsthand experience with those who have not put all their affairs in order and with those who have. Between my own experience and countless others, I can tell you getting your affairs in order as early as possible is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and for your loved ones.

Getting your affairs in order is not something to be put off, done another day. Another day may not come, and if it does, you may be incapacitated, unable to process the weighty decisions involved in handling your affairs.

It's also not something only "old people" need to worry about. Cancer can strike and kill at any age. So can heart failure, liver failure, kidney failure, COVID, other infections. I've known more people than I care to count who died from one of these causes before they reached 40 years old.

Do the unpleasant work now to give a great gift later. Those who wait frequently end up compounding their loved one's stress and sense of overwhelm, as well as their own.

Things to do

The following list is not exhaustive, nor does it constitute legal advice. I'm not an attorney, and even if I was, I'm not *your* attorney. It's also not likely I'm your next of kin. So, all of what follows is something you need to discuss with *your* loved ones and *your* attorney.

Write a will

What do you want to happen with the material things that matter most to you? Who do you want to decide what happens with them? A will answers these questions in a way that makes the disposition of those things easier and the fulfilling of your wishes much more likely. Learn about probating a will in Texas [here](#).

Do you have a will? You should. If you don't, the government is more than happy to impose its will on what you leave behind.

If you have a will, is it up to date?

If you don't have a will, Texas Baptist Missions Foundation has a [will-](#)

[writing tool](#) that may be a good fit for you. You also may want to consult an attorney for other options.

Advanced directives

What do you want to happen to you? To your body? What do you *not* want to happen?

Yes, you do need to think about those questions ahead of time, make decisions about them and put your decisions in writing—preferably not on the back of a napkin.

Also, who has power of attorney—medical or otherwise—in the event significant decisions need to be made about your care?

Waiting until you're in the middle of trauma is *not* the time to begin to think about the use of heroic measures and life support. Waiting until the moment a decision must be made is not the time to wonder who has authority to make decisions for you if you can't make them for yourself.

If possible, do you want to die at home? Make as many plans and arrangements as you can as far ahead as you can for that possibility.

After death

After you die, do you want your body to be buried [and how](#), cremated, donated to science?

There are related questions you need to think about, such as if you want a marker and where you want your remains to be.

This is the time to think about these things.

You also need to make sure your wishes are in writing and clearly communicated to your loved ones. Your loved ones shouldn't have to make all those decisions. Remember, they will be preoccupied with grieving your

death. Give them the gift of having as many decisions already made as possible.

You also need to think about your funeral or memorial service. What songs do you want? Do you want any live music? Who do you want to participate in your funeral? What Scripture is important to you? Where do you want your service to be?

While it's true specific answers may change over time, some won't. Also, having these questions answered ahead of time accomplishes two things: It makes your wishes more likely to be fulfilled, and it takes a tremendous load off your loved ones when they likely already are overwhelmed.

Include your loved ones

Talking with your loved ones about these things as you work through them can lead to rich and life-giving conversations you can't have otherwise. You also may make better decisions about each of them by including your loved ones in the process.

And it may give them the peace of mind and assurance that important things already are taken care of.

One more thing

I realize you'd rather think about other things right now. Me, too. But there's one more thing you need to think about.

[Where are you with Jesus?](#)

What do you believe about Jesus, and how does that impact your life—now and after death?

What do your loved ones know about where you are with Jesus?

If you don't have any other conversation, at least have this one.

My father-in-law has not been shy about his faith in Jesus, which is giving him peace through these days.

Thankfully, my father-in-law and mother-in-law have had all these conversations and more with us. We've talked about these things together for years. And it is proving to be a great gift to us. You can and should do the same for your loved ones.

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