



The Way of the Lord

Four purposes for training succeeding generations

1. To both role model and train up the next generation to live in loving trust in Jesus.
2. To role model and nurture the journey into Christlike character.
3. To train for a vocation that brings glory to our Father.
4. To expand their spiritual horizon beyond themselves to serve the goals and purposes of our Father and reach the lost.

As you can tell, the topic of death is very personal to us. Over the years we've worked out a biblical understanding for preparing for death. We hope our writings will help you. Remember, our choices may be different than yours, so prayerfully work out your own halakhahs.



Story #2: Where, O Death, Is Your Sting?

It's so heartening to go to your parent's funeral fully assured that you'll see them again in heaven. Both of Mike's parents put their trust in Jesus following the conversion of him and his sister, Mary. Before Mom's death she was our greatest prayer ally in our ministry. Often she'd call us with God's answer concerning something we'd been praying about. It's a story in itself of the period between our conversion in 1977 when his Mom refused to speak to us, until the point when each of them put their trust in Jesus. God is good, and His mercies to us have been wonderful! Death and the second death are meaningless because of Jesus' victory. We look forward to seeing our loved ones again!



James: How are things going with your Mom, Sue? Mike was telling me that she's now losing her mental capabilities.

Sue: Yes, she's been diagnosed with dementia, plus bouts of pneumonia. She's becoming what she's always feared, mentally incapable of taking care of herself.

Joyce: We've had to watch James's Dad go through dialysis for the past 8 years. His deterioration hurts our heart, but his faith in our Lord encourages us a lot. How are you feeling through all of this?

Sue: It saddens me because Mummie has lived independently for so long, and now in a matter of months she's a prisoner to her worst fears. I've shared Jesus with her over the years but it seems she bounces back and forth between her trust in Him and her frustration over her incapacity.

James: Are you and your sister in agreement about the treatment she's receiving?

Sue: Yes, we are. Mike urged us to confront her a few years ago about her desires if she was unable to care for herself. When she saw we were insistent to know what she wanted, and that we were motivated by our love for her, she spoke openly with us.



James: Joyce and I had a chance to talk with Sue about her Mom's condition. I don't think my Dad has much longer to live, and I was wondering if you could give me some things to consider before he dies.

Mike: Well, you did one of the most important things two years ago when you moved back to Gallup to be near your Mom and Dad. You also got your family together with your Dad to deal with any forgiveness that was needed. That helped him a lot.

James: I can see how important it is for a generation to receive forgiveness from the one preceding it. It's too bad some of my siblings are still bitter about the past.

Mike: I know, but that's *their* prison of bitterness. Your Dad may feel bad about their unforgiveness, but he is no longer in bondage himself. As you've described your Dad from that day, it reminds me of the freedom my own Dad found. In his last years after coming to Jesus, he hugged and kissed us a lot, something he hardly ever did when we were younger. How are your brothers and sisters who refused to forgive doing?

James: Terrible! Their marriages are strained, and they have no love in their hearts. You once mentioned that there is *humility* in loving others, and *power* in bitterness. It seems they've chosen the power over others that bitterness brings. I'd like to just shake them sometimes. They seem to be in a stupor over how their bitterness is destroying them and their families.



Preparing & Caring

Family is a sequence of one generation succeeded by another. In Genesis 49 we see Jacob gathering his family around them. The passage ends wonderfully with this: "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people" (v. 33).

I think we would all like to leave the world this way. We also read that Joseph was given specific instructions pertaining to his father's care.

For every generation there is intergenerational care that must be considered. The guiding parameter of all care for another person is found in the teachings of Jesus: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

In the absence of any other specific guidance, do for your family member what you would want for yourself. For instance, if you and your parent are followers of Jesus, would you rather be with Jesus or stay on



Mike: I know what it feels like to watch a parent suffer. For over a year before my Dad's death he was receiving blood transfusions that caused him tremendous agony afterwards. He was in Connecticut and I was working in Massachusetts when, one morning while I was praying, the Lord told me, "I want you to leave your job on Monday and go take care of your father. I am going to be bringing him home soon, and I want you to be there when he dies." I went to my boss, and it was as though God had gone before me. He really believed I should be with Dad too!

James: It's wonderful to see God *wait* until His people are in position for His purposes. What happened next?

Mike: When I got to Connecticut my Dad was in the hospital. He'd been semi-comatose for several months, and had just received another transfusion. My heart was filled with love for him. We'd always been able to talk openly, and I had a good sense about his wishes.

My Mom and my brothers and I went to talk with Dad's doctor. Because of the legal ramifications he couldn't speak openly about what we should do with Dad. So we asked him hypothetically, "What if he were *your* Dad?" Then the doctor spoke freely: "You're no longer prolonging life for your Dad. He'll never get any better. You're only forestalling death with these agonizing transfusions."

James: "Only forestalling death". That's an interesting way to view a person's life. It almost seems like we have the "power of God" through medical technology.

Mike: You could say that. *Medicine has progressed way beyond the guidance of biblical ethics.* As we talked with the doctor the four of us agreed that Dad would not receive any more transfusions. We would bring him home so Mom and I could care for him. He lived five more weeks. It was a great honor for me to take care of him. And having a good sense of his own desires made it easy for me to guide the steps leading up to his death and, ultimately, his eternal homecoming.

James: What you've learned through helping your own parents has helped Joyce and me think about ours.

Mike: My time of taking care of both my Dad in 1982-83, and Sue and I caring for my Mom in 1998-2000, was difficult yet rewarding. Our care for Mom did a lot for us as a couple. We really had to rely on each other more than any other time in our marriage. We once went 4 months without a day off, but that was God's design to stretch us. Something wonderful happened in our hearts to validate what we'd been writing about!

James: Are there any pitfalls we should watch out for?

Mike: My parents were Catholics. Fortunately their teaching is that you don't have to take extraordinary means to keep a person alive. Few if any Protestant communities offer biblical guidance on this matter. Mom and I went to her priest and talked everything over with him. He reaffirmed his support for our decision for Dad not to receive any more transfusions. His affirmation brought her great peace.

When you're making decisions that lead toward the eventual death of someone, you can appear to be a "Kevorkian" to those who lack the *loving courage* to carry out their parent's wishes. Some of our relatives were like this, but not even my Mom had a moment of guilt. We've met many surviving children who are tormented by guilt. Some are still bothered because their relatives made them feel guilty for not getting a more expensive casket!

Years later, while caring for my Mom, we followed similar steps. She'd become bedridden, with poor circulation in her legs. Amputation was a strong possibility. She'd been on heart medicine for years, and with her doctor's counsel we discontinued that. She died peacefully six months later with both her legs. I remember we sang her favorite hymns just before she passed.





the body, mentally incapacitated and suffering through extraordinary intervention? Do the same for them!

At His death, Jesus showed His loving concern for His mother. He entrusted her into the care of his close friend. "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home" (John 19:26,27).

Keep in mind that upholding human dignity is a prime concern as you care for another. Every person is made in the image of God. If it was worth the sacrificial death of Jesus to redeem that person, then your effort to care for them should be commensurate.

This is the foundation of Paul's words to Timothy, "But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God...If any woman who is a

Joyce: What do you do if your parents refuse to talk with you about preparations for their death? I run into a lot of people whose parents won't even discuss it.

Sue: My Mom and Dad were like that. But God had been revealing wisdom to Mike in this area over the course of several years. At the retreat center he'd ask questions to find out what was going on in other families.

Just months before my father died Mike encouraged me to be straight forward with him. Up to that time he'd always say, "I guess I'll just end up playing cards in hell with my friends." When I finished talking to him about Jesus and what he needed to do, he took me seriously. By the testimony I heard from others I believe he put his trust in Jesus before he died suddenly from a heart attack two months later. Mike strongly encouraged my sister Billie and me to confront my mother and find out her wishes. Her previous way of avoiding this discussion had been, "When I can't take care of myself, just shoot me."

Joyce: So I gather you're saying that sometimes children need to confront and press their parents to talk. If we don't have a clear picture of their desires, and a living will in place, my siblings and I will end up with a mess.

Sue: From our inquiries into other families and our own experience, "mess" is a polite way to describe the hurt and guilt that come by *not* confronting a parent who refuses to deal with the reality of their own death. You may have to be "lovingly ruthless"!



During Mike's Mom's 80th (and last) birthday party

Margaret: [Mom's lifetime friend]. Mary, I think it's wonderful that Mike and Sue are caring for you.

Mary: Margaret, I have seen too many in nursing homes just sitting like zombies. Their family rarely visits them. I can't tell you how much I feared that I'd end up that way. When I shared that with Mike a few years ago, he told me he'd come home and make sure he was there to close my eyes.

Margaret: I wish someone would have the courage to do that for my sister. She's had Alzheimer's for 10 years and is like a vegetable. Two years ago her family put a feeding tube in her stomach and she just lays there unconscious. It's killing me, Mary, to see her like that—91 and unable to die. She even had pneumonia, but the hospital resuscitated her and sent her back unconscious to the woman hired to take care of her. I need to talk with my own kids about what I want when I can't make decisions for myself any longer. I don't want anyone to keep *me* alive just for the sake of having a body to tend to.



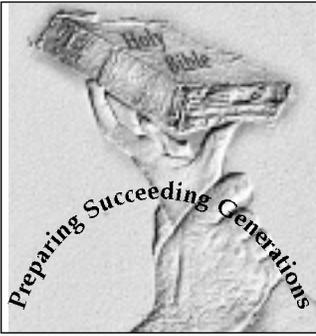
During Mike's Mom's 80th birthday party

Helen: [daughter of Mom's close friend] Mary, I can't remember ever not knowing you. You were my Mom's best friend and you've been a "Mom" to me since she passed away.

Mary: Your Mom and I did a lot together. During some of my toughest times she was always there for me. She was a true friend. I bet she watches the two of us every time you come over to play cribbage with me!

Helen: I think she's watching, too. Do you know, Mary, you're really fortunate to have a family that loves you so much. You always use to say it was Mike who gave you the most trouble of all your children, and here he and Sue are living with you!

Mary: He always had a way of making you face the things you didn't necessarily want to face. He's like a catfish in a pool of trout—he keeps them all swimming. Somehow he understands that things don't get better until they're addressed.



believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need" (1 Tim. 5:4,16).

Personal Encouragement

These stories have the common theme of preparing succeeding generations. A few months ago an older person shared with me, "We trained our kids to be independent." Although that was true for them, it is not a biblical truth.

The historic outsourcing of our families for others to teach them so they could be successful by the world's standards is no longer viable if we are going to train godly generations to succeed us. Preparing for the death of the preceding generation has wonderful ramifications. As with our own families, it's a time for healing wounds, of appreciating and expressing what that person has meant to us, and to be fully prepared to grieve their loss when they are gone. All of these are necessary so that we can have healthy relationships in our own generation. The emotional value of appreciation has a lot to do with our ability to love others as God desires.



Mom: I know it's tough on you and Sue to leave Colorado to come take care of me.

Mike: Mom, you're both my Mother and our sister in the Lord. You're the one who's blessing the both of us!

Sue: You look wonderful, Mom! I'm glad you're well enough to enjoy this Easter with your family coming over. Did you ever think that you'd be a great-grandmother?



Mom: No. When you're first married you have no idea of how life will end up. I had my husband for 46 years before he died. God has always held me 'in the palm of His hand.' [Mom's favorite expression].



Sue: Mummie, do you remember when Billie and I sat down with you to discuss what you wanted when you weren't able to take care of yourself?

Mummie: I sure do! I know at first I resisted. But I knew you loved me and wanted to make sure you fulfilled my wishes, so I was finally able to talk about it.

Sue: You've always been a private person, Mummie. But the deep affection you've shown to special people in your life made such an impact on me! It's because of you that I've been able to get out of myself and help others. See what a ripple effect you've had? I want you to know how much I love you!

Billie: You've been so much more than a mother to me, Mummie. You've been my dear friend! My heart is full of so many memories of us laughing and talking and doing things together. Thank you for being there for me!



John Dowgiewicz
Mike's Dad died 1983



Mary Dowgiewicz
Mike's Mom died 2000



William Goodrich
Sue's Dad died 2001



Rosmar Goodrich
Sue's Mom

Thoughts for Discussion and Application

1. If you're an elderly parent, have you prepared your child(ren) for the possibility that you may lose your mental faculties before you die? Have you designated a specific person to represent your desires? Do you have a living will? Is it comprehensive in its coverage? [Mike's Mom had been on various heart medicines for years. Her living will only called for "no resuscitation." In hindsight, much of her suffering could have been alleviated had she included discontinuance of these drugs when "forestalling death" became the arena of her care.]
2. If you are an adult child, do you clearly understand your parents desires? If you have siblings, have you all sat together to discuss these matters with your parents?
3. As you discuss preparatory wishes with your parents, keep your own children abreast of the different considerations. This is a special training time for them. You are not seeking your child's approval, but letting them into your heart's relationship with their grandparents.