

Champs

Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services



The Conversations We Seldom Have

(Honoring My Wishes Workshop - Publicity Article 5 of 5)

The day started like any other, up early to dress and head to work. The exciting thing was dreaming about tomorrow and the vacation my husband and I were finally going to take. Most of our lives we had just worked worked and worked—caring for the family, employer expectations, and social obligations—the “usual” household functioning. Today I was holding onto the idea that we would finally get in the car and drive to our special destination for “our time alone” after nearly forty years of marriage.

After work I started packing for our trip while wondering where my husband was as he’d left no note. Then the telephone rang and I raced to get it before it would go to voice mail as it would be him. But the voice on the other end of the line said “Is this Mrs. _____?” I answered “Yes” with a heightened feeling of uneasiness. “This is Officer _____; we found your name on articles in your husband’s truck. Your husband has collapsed and we are currently doing CPR on him, please tell us what you can about his health conditions so I can relay that information to the rescue team currently working on him.” I remember giving a brief health history – heart attacks, several angioplasties, insulin dependent diabetes, and hypertension. The officer gave me the name of the hospital they were transporting him to and said the emergency room physician would call me as soon as they had concrete news on his status. He advised me to wait for the telephone call before starting out for the hospital which was about a hundred miles away.

Minutes seemed like hours before the telephone rang. I still remember the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach as I picked up the receiver and the doctor told me they had done everything they could but he had had a cardiac arrest and died. The doctor tried to be nice and gentle, but got right to the point

of “would you like to donate organs?” We’d talked about this, but he’d never expressed his final decision. Do you want an autopsy? The doctor talked more, but I don’t recall his words. My world had stopped! I was frozen in time. “Where will you want the body transported to?” “Do you have a funeral home picked out?” All questions that I didn’t want to answer nor did I have answers to. We’d made no plans. The pain was so deep! By now it was Friday evening and when I called the funeral home where I’d previously attended a funeral I was told they would make the arrangements to transport the body and I could come to the funeral home in the morning to make the final arrangements. The earliest we could hold a funeral would be the beginning of the week.

By now I’d told our two children of their dad’s death and they too were in total shock. Each was grieving in a different way. Now it was time to call “his family,” but I had no definitive dates and times for the funeral. In fact, we didn’t even own a funeral plot so I wasn’t sure where I’d have him buried. His relatives had a lot of “issues” and discourse among them so no matter what decisions I made I already knew not everyone would be satisfied. My husband had instructed me not to spend a fortune on a funeral, that he did not want to be cremated, just ‘bury me and for goodness sakes, don’t buy me a suit - I hate them.’ The problem was he’d never told his relatives these things! This left me to become the “unreasonable one.” “Why didn’t you take care of this?” were the thoughts that raced through my mind during some of the initial hours and long into the following days.

The next few days hurried by in a blur of discourse and disagreement. It seemed like there were hundreds of decisions to be made immediately that really needed more time to be processed adequately. The funeral times

available did not fit well with a family member's business plans and the simple religious ceremony and graveside service he had expressed a desire for were not what some relatives thought appropriate. The new pastor at our church didn't know him at all and therefore it was difficult for him to speak in a personal and meaningful way at his services. It seemed that no one was satisfied. When one person told me the funeral time wasn't convenient for them I blurted back, "His death wasn't convenient for me either, but he's dead so live with the arrangements!"

Picking out a funeral plot was an interesting experience. Did I want to eventually be buried next to him? What about the children, did they also want to purchase adjacent funeral plots? You need a vault - what's that? How much does all of this cost? How soon do we have to pay for this? How many announcements will be needed? What scripture verses and songs do you want played at the services? Visitation hours were set up, but his out of town family could not

make these, so special hours were established for them immediately prior to the funeral. The decisions seemed endless and devastating - each decision was open to controversy and discord.

This was all overwhelming! No time to just grieve, cry and deal with our own feelings as everyone's discourse was a full-time job in itself. Why didn't we ever discuss all this in detail and write it down? More importantly, why didn't we do all this and discuss it with the family members? Granted, the family might not have agreed with his wishes, but at least they would have known they were his!

The conversations never held. The details left incomplete! The stress created. Now it was just God and I dealing with the details. Thank you God for never leaving my side—you and you alone were steadfast. *Hear my prayer, O Lord, let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress.* (Psalm 102:1)

Thank you to Yvonne Stock for sharing her very personal story!

HONORING MY WISHES

We know all of us will die, but many of us prefer to avoid conversations about life-altering events or dying; which is ironic since we have the promise of eternal life from our Lord. ***Honoring My Wishes*** is designed to encourage Christians to engage in such conversations long before we need to make the decisions. The *Honoring My Wishes* Workshop is designed to:

- help people think about the kind of health care they will receive in their final days
- help people prepare for their death, and make plans for their funeral celebration
- help people make needed decisions to ensure that their wishes are carried out
- help people complete needed paperwork and communicate their decisions with loved ones
- help families know they are honoring God and their loved ones as they carry out those plans

In addition to the *Honoring My Wishes* Workshop Booklet, there are additional resources to help with locating valuable documents, making funeral plans; a sermon with outline, and five publicity articles to help people begin to think about these important matters prior to the workshops.

(NOTE TO WORKSHOP COORDINATOR: Insert date, time and location of workshop here)

We especially encourage grown children to attend with their parents so these important matters can be discussed together. Specially trained **Encouragers** will be available to assist each family to walk through these important decisions and conversations. You can obtain more information by contacting the church.

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