

Thoughts on Death and Dying (Making Eschatology Personal)

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I don't mean to shock you, but mortality rates are still one hundred percent, and none of us are getting any younger.

We can develop vaccines to protect us from many illnesses, but there's no vaccine for mortality.

From pandemics to violence to old age ... we're surrounded every day with reminders that this life is a gift with an uncertain duration.

In our early 60's, my wife and I put our affairs in order, as they say, realizing that we were either going to be prepared for the inevitable or be in denial about it. To be on this side of 60 and thinking about death made it all seem far less theoretical.

During my years as a pastor, I walked with many people through the dying process, and I helped thousands grieve the loss of a loved one. I became convinced that there are two mistakes people commonly make regarding death.

First, many of us deny death. We push the thought away whenever it comes. We refuse to talk about it. It makes us uncomfortable, so we avoid the subject and that avoidance increases the chances of us being unprepared when the reality of death comes — to loved ones, or to ourselves.

Second, many of us minimize, sanitize, or sentimentalize death. When the subject comes up, we skip ahead to talk of heaven, being with God, "going to a better place," and so on.

Sadly, however good heaven will be after the dying process ends, many people are shocked and unprepared for how difficult it can be to get from here to there. They are unprepared for the dying process — their own or their loved one's. Whether it is a slow process, a painful process, a quick process, or a sudden event, death can leave devastation in its wake for the unrealistic and unprepared.

Whether through denying, minimizing, or sanitizing death, many of us are left vulnerable to being traumatized. That's why I'd like to propose several ways of reframing death.

1. Death as Gift

The theology I inherited offered only one way to think of death: as something unnatural and evil. Drawing from a rather shallow interpretation of various Bible verses (such as Romans 6:23), many see death as nothing more than a punishment for human sin. Death, they say, was not part of God's original plan for creation.

To any of us who have even a basic scientific education, this way of thinking is untenable. Death, we see, is built into the unfolding of creation. It is not unnatural; it is natural. It is not an evil intrusion; death is a necessary feature of all created life.

When we are born, the same genetic code that guides our growth also guides our aging. Just as a birth or beginning is inherent to created life, so is death or ending. To put it elegantly: natality necessarily entails mortality.

Through birth, through natality, each of us is given a turn, a chance, an opportunity:

a chance to borrow atoms and energy,

a turn to occupy some time and space,

an opportunity to create our own unique story and experience our own unique adventure.

But after some time, our chance, turn, or opportunity comes to an end, and we vacate the space we have occupied to make room for someone else. Death, in this way, is an act of generosity ... not hoarding the space, but giving someone else their turn to enjoy the mystery and gift of life. Life is God's gift to us (aided by our parents and so many others). Death is our gift

to others, like a dying tree that falls so that new saplings have some sunlight to reach toward.

St. Francis captured this vision beautifully in his profoundly beautiful Cantic of the Sun: “Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Death, who will embrace the life of all people.”

It’s worth contemplating how different life would be if we were incapable of death. When you think of what we would lose for this supposed gain, you realize that the gift of death is inseparable from the gift of life.

For those who suffer sickness or oppression, of course, it’s easier to see death as a friend, a gift, a rest from labors, an end to suffering. But even for those who experience a life full of health and freedom, we have to realize that refusing to make room for others ... for one’s children and grandchildren, for the children of our neighbors ... would be an act of selfishness. And what would we become by hoarding opportunities? We would become ungrateful, complacent, egotistical, perhaps even bored.

Understanding the role of death, in this way, helps us appreciate every sunrise and sunset, every day, every breath and heartbeat ... because our days are numbered. If we don’t live mindfully, we will waste the precious gift of time. If we don’t seize opportunities, we will waste our precious abilities.

So we can imagine coming to the end of our lives and saying, “I have had my turn on this beautiful planet. I have enjoyed each moment to the full. I have given all I had to give. I have done what was mine to do with all my heart. In the process, I have had my opportunity to grow and experience and develop, to become who I now am. Now it’s my turn to allow others to have this space, to have their own turn. I step back to allow them to step into the spotlight to have their time under the sun.”

2. Death as Doorway

Many of us can’t see death as a gift because we see the universe as a chain of cause and effect, with a big bang being a cause of other causes of other

causes that push us into this moment. These causes keep pushing us out of the past and into the present, and eventually, we are pushed against our will out of life entirely, over the edge, so to speak, into death.

I'd like to suggest that we "reverse the polarity of the universe" by shifting the power in the universe from the past to the future. In this alternative view, we stop thinking of a linear, mechanical chain reaction of cause and effect that works like a bulldozer relentlessly pushing us forward. Instead, we can think of the future as an infinite reservoir or possibility and opportunity, coming toward us as the present moment. We aren't driven by the past alone; we also live in this present moment, and we are constantly receiving the incoming gift of the future. Instead of digging in our heels to resist the relentless push of time, we open ourselves to the incoming gift. We lean forward and feel drawn forward by a "telos" or purpose or calling... to fulness, to maturity, to participation, to an expansive unity that doesn't obliterate diversity but celebrates it. For those of us who believe in God, God is the source and essence of this gift of future, of possibility, of life.

We often speak of God as the one who was, who is, and who is to come. The God who was holds all our past. The God who is meets, accompanies us, and fills us now. And the God who is to come contains all the future that is waiting to come to us and give itself to us.

With that realization in mind, death could never mean leaving God, because there is nowhere we can escape from God's presence, as the Psalmist said (139:7). Our past is in God. Our present is in God. Our future is in God. In that light, death simply means leaving the presence of God in this little neighborhood of history called the present and joining God in the infinite eternal presence.

Some religious leaders tried to trap Jesus once by bringing up a conflict between moral sense and belief in a life that continues beyond biological death. In response, Jesus said that *to God, all who ever lived are alive* (Luke 20:38). Paul said something similar: whether we live or die, we belong to God, and our life is hidden with Christ in God. (See Romans 14:8-13, Colossians 3:3).

In that light, death is merely a doorway, a passage from one way of living in God's presence (in the present, in our bodies, in this experience of space and

time) to another way of living in God's presence (in the "undiscovered country" of unimaginable possibility). The amazing grace that has "brought us safe thus far" will "lead us home" through the doorway of death. This approach locates heaven -- or the center or headquarters, so to speak, of presence of God -- not in another realm, and not behind us in the past, and not above us (as if God were in the sky). Instead, we see God holding every moment of our past as the loving witness of what we have been, and we see ourselves joining God in the flow of possibility which the future constantly brings to us as the present. In this way, as we prepare for the inevitable process of dying, we lean forward into the mystery of what awaits us, not with fear and dread, but with peace and trust.

3. Death as Completion

It may surprise you to hear me say that one of the gifts of death is judgment. Let me explain.

For many people, *judgment* means condemnation, and as such, it means little more than punishing wrong. But in the biblical library, *judgment* means much more than condemnation and punishment. It means setting things right, dealing decisively with evil and freeing good to run wild. For the oppressed and persecuted, that means liberation and vindication, and for the violent and oppressors, it means exposure and accountability. But in the end, to have evil decisively exposed, named, dealt with, and removed ... in the end, that's good news for everyone.

After death, then, in God's presence in the future, all pretense and hypocrisy, like all hidden virtues and goodness, are brought to light, because in God there can be no darkness or deceit or ignorance. This means that the true accounting, evaluation, or assessment of our lives cannot help but happen.

This true accounting, evaluation, or assessment will not be harsh, merciless, or graceless, as many assume, because in God, what we may think of as opposites -- grace and truth, justice and mercy, kindness and strength -- are beautifully and fully integrated. God never expresses justice at the expense of kindness, or vice versa, but every expression of justice is kind and every expression of kindness is just. God's integrated judgment, then, could never be merely retributive -- seeking to punish wrongdoers for their wrongs and in this way balance some sort of karmic cosmic equation. No, God's judgment

would have to be far higher and better than that: it would have to be restorative. It would aim far higher than merely convicting people of wrong; its goal would be universal repentance, universal restoration, universal reconciliation, universal purification, universal “putting wrong things right.” (This is a God-sized task, which is why human beings should never presume to play God by judging others.)

In this sense, judgment means bringing things to a just and merciful outcome, which in turn means reconciling, not merely punishing; treating and healing, not merely diagnosing; transforming, not merely exposing; redeeming (or giving new value), not merely evaluating (or assessing current value).

So when we say, with the writer of Hebrews, that “it is appointed to human beings to die once, and after this, the judgment,” we are not saying, “and after this, the condemnation” (Hebrews 9:27). We are saying, with John, that to “see God,” to be in God’s unspeakable light, will purge us of all darkness:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this open in them purify themselves, just as God is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)

Since “what we will be has not yet been made known,” it is hard to say anything more, except this: In the end, God will be all in all, and all will be well (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Does that mean there will be no cost, no loss, no regret, nor mourning? Paul’s image of a cleansing, purifying, or refining fire is appropriate here (1 Corinthians 3). God’s fire can’t consume “gold, silver, and precious stones,” because in so doing, God would be destroying something good, which would render God evil. But the cleansing fire must remove the “wood, hay, and stubble” of hypocrisy, evil, folly. Some of us, Paul said, will experience this as a great loss, suggesting that once the evil or worthless thoughts, words, and deeds of our story are burned away, there will not be much of our life’s story left. We will be saved “by fire,” he says; perhaps we’d say “by the skin of our teeth.” But others of us, recalling Jesus’ parable about the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25), will be surprised in a positive way: thousands of

deeds of kindness that we have long forgotten will have been witnessed by God, and we will feel the affirmation of God saying, “Well done.”

4. Death as Motivation

This approach to death changes the way you live. It reminds you that life on earth is a temporary gift, a “turn” you get to take and then relinquish, an opportunity you can use or waste. In this sense, life is not something that is yours alone: it is something bigger than any individual, a bigger network or web or story in which you have a small part to play. Your job is to play it well, for the larger good, the common good.

This awareness motivates you to use your wealth to make others rich, not to hoard it; to use your power to empower others, not to protect yourself; to receive gratefully and give generously. In fact, this understanding of life and death can free you to give up your life for things that matter more than life itself.

Dr. King knew this. When white supremacists tried to kill him and his family, he spent a night in prayer and reflection. He faced the fear of death and came to a place of hope that allowed him to say:

To our most bitter opponents we say: “We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.” (From *A Christmas Sermon on Peace*, December 24, 1967. Widely available online, including <http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2003/12/276406.shtml>.)

We've all heard the cliché about someone being “so heavenly minded he's no earthly good,” and we've probably met people – and congregations, and denominations – on whom the cliché fits like an old bedroom slipper. But I hope now it's becoming clear: there is also a way of being so earthly minded that you're no earthly good. If your fear of death inspires in you a desperate craving to hold on to every pleasure, hoard all wealth, and avoid all suffering because, as the old beer commercial said, “you only go around once in life,” you will become increasingly selfish, small, even cruel.

Thankfully, there's a way of being heavenly minded that inspires you to do more earthly good than you ever would have done otherwise. In this way of living, my life isn't about me. My life is me being about something bigger than me ... the unfolding story of love, the arc of the universe bending toward justice, the doing of God's will on earth as in heaven. It's me receiving the good gift of life (which includes death as an essential feature), and using “my turn” as an opportunity to contribute all the goodness, beauty, and truth I can before it is my turn to pass through the doorway into completion. Knowing that my turn here won't last forever motivates me to live each day to the full.

5. Preparing for Dying

Over the last several years, I had the responsibility and tender, sometimes painful privilege of walking with my parents through the dying process to the doorway of death. My father died at 89 of the long-term effects of atherosclerosis, and he had a rapid descent into dementia near the end. My mother died at 92 of a long, slow dementia-related decline.

I would have to say that the dying process was, if not the hardest thing either of them experienced, very close to the hardest thing. Of my four grandparents, two had long and difficult dying processes, one had a short and difficult process, and one had an effortless process: he was healthy until the day he died at 84, when he died suddenly of a stroke. It happened so fast as he was tending his backyard garden that he didn't even have time to put out his hands to break his fall. He was here, and then in an instant, he was gone.

Modern medicine can make the dying process longer and harder, prolonging life as life becomes less and less tolerable. Modern medicine can also make the dying process easier, especially with the advent of palliative care. Since none of us knows what kind of dying process we will have, if we are wise, we will prepare ourselves for whatever form the dying process might take. We will prepare ourselves legally and financially, if we are able. We will learn to talk frankly and openly about our death with those who will survive us. We will discern our desires and make them known. In these ways, we will be prepared not only spiritually for the life that awaits beyond this life, but also emotionally and practically for the dying process as well.

For me, this has meant running through scenarios of how I might die. For example, I may die a sudden death. I had a trial run for this in 2010, at the age of 54. I contracted two tick-borne diseases that were causing liver failure, unbeknownst to me. Over the course of a few days I went from feeling 54 to feeling 84. Suddenly I had a high fever and severe heart arrhythmia. I drove to the emergency room and remember being rushed down a hallway on a gurney to have an emergency heart scan. The nurse told me there was something seriously wrong with my blood chemistry. My liver was failing and my electrolytes were so out of whack the doctors were surprised my heart was still beating.

Lying on that gurney, I thought, "Wow. This could be it. This could be the end." And two profound emotions washed over me: peace and gratitude. I was not afraid to die. The same divine presence that accompanied me all the days of my life was with me in the valley of the shadow of death.

And I was filled with the awareness of how blessed my life had been. I brought my wife's face and presence to mind (she was away visiting some of our grandkids when I took sick). Then I brought the faces of each of my kids and grandkids. I felt unspeakably blessed.

I can only hope that when my actual time to die comes, I will feel that same overwhelming flow of peace and gratitude. I believe I will.

But walking through the dying process with my parents let me know that I may not. I may be confused, especially if I have dementia. I may be in pain. So part of my preparation for the dying process is to run through other more difficult scenarios and prepare myself for them. Part of that preparation has

also included writing out my wishes and sharing them with my adult children, making it clear that I do not want my life prolonged medically when my chances for recovery are low.

6. Imagining Death

You might wonder what I expect to happen when I die. Of course, I don't know. But I expect to experience death as a passage, like birth, like passing through a door. Again, I don't know how that passing will come ... like a slow slipping away in disease, like a sudden jolt or shock in an accident, like losing my grip and feeling that I'm falling, only to discover that I'm not falling out of life, but deeper into it.

On the other side, I imagine I will be in the unimaginable light of God's presence, a goodness so good, a richness so rich, a holiness so holy, a mercy and love so strong and true that all of my evil, pride, lust, greed, resentment, and fear will be instantly melted out of me. I imagine that at that moment, I will more than ever be filled with love and gratitude ... to God, and with God, for everyone and everything.

I imagine I will feel a sense of reunion – yes, with loved ones I have known who have died before me, but also with my great-great-great-great-grandparents and my thirty-second cousins whose names I've never known but to whom I am related. I imagine that sense of relatedness that I now feel with closest of kin will somehow be expanded to every person who has ever lived, because ultimately, we are all relations. And I doubt it will stop with human beings, but will expand infinitely outwards to all of God's creation. I imagine that I will feel the fullest, most exquisite sense of oneness and interrelatedness and harmony that I approached vaguely or momentarily in my most ecstatic experiences in this life.

I imagine that I will instantly feel differently about my sufferings. I will see, not the short-term pain that so preoccupied me on the past side of death, but instead the virtue and courage and compassion that were forged in me through each experience of pain's heat and pressure. On the future side of death, I imagine that I will bless my sufferings, and feel about them as I feel about my pleasures now; I may in fact feel about many of my pleasures then

as I feel about my sufferings now. What has been suffered or lost will feel weightless compared to the substance that has been gained through the suffering and loss.

I imagine that in all this, I will feel a sense of ... “Ah yes, now I see.” What I longed for, reached for, touched but couldn’t grasp, will then be so clear, and all of my unfulfilled longing on this side of death will, I imagine, enrich and fulfill the having on that side of death.

If my life ended today, a few years short of the traditional “three-score and ten,” I would have had far more than my share of joy. So I imagine that my entry into life with God beyond this life will feel like an explosion of gratitude as I suddenly and fully realize all I’ve had and taken for granted. So much will become clear.

Of course, I have accrued a lengthy list of regrets through my life so far ... and the older I get, the more readily these regrets spring to mind: a mentally retarded child (that was the term we used back then) to whom I was inexcusably cruel as a boy ... being overly stern with my kids when they were young ... letting some ugly and unhealthy ambitions drive me in my thirties and early forties ... being too preoccupied and in too big a hurry too much of the time. Somehow, I imagine that as I pass through the doorway of death, these regrets will somehow be both validated and put away: *yes, you were right to be sad about those things, and many more like them, but now they are behind you. You were always forgiven, and now you can appreciate just how much that means.*

I expect that will experience my regrets as bittersweet recognitions: I will wish that I had given more generously, served more sacrificially, risked more daringly, waited more patiently, forgiven more freely, endured more graciously, and loved more selflessly. Interestingly – I’m simply reporting what I feel as I write these words – having this expectation makes me want to do these very things now, on this side of death, while I still can.

I imagine, then, that dying will be like diving or falling or stepping into a big wave at the beach, and I will feel myself lifted off my feet, and taken up into a swirl and curl and spin more powerful than I can now imagine. But there will not be fear, because the motion and flow will be the dance of the Holy

Mystery; the rising tide will be life and joy; the undertow will be love, and I will be drawn deeper and deeper in.

Of course, whatever I imagine death might be like, I don't know for certain. If I die and experience nothing because there is no more "me" left to experience anything, there will be no "me" to be disappointed. Even if that's the case, I can live my life now in such a way that when others who outlive me remember me, they will remember someone who loved them well and lived life to the full.

So I think I am being honest to say that I don't fear death.

I don't look forward to the process of dying. I would be happy if it were short and painless and occurred in my sleep. Between now and then, I hope I can live a long life and enjoy watching my grandchildren grow and have children of their own. But because of who I believe God to be, I do not fear passing into a more direct experience of God. I begin to understand the pull that Paul wrote about (Philippians 1:20 ff). On the one hand, I feel a pull to stay here in this life, enjoying the light and love and goodness of God with so many people who are dear to me, with so much to enjoy and appreciate, with so much good work left to be done. On the other hand, I feel an equal and opposite pull towards the light and love and goodness of God experienced more directly beyond this life:

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two... (St. Paul, Philippians 1)

7. Death as Commencement

Many people who attend church and read the Bible have been given notions of the afterlife that bring them great comfort. But other people find those notions the very opposite of comforting. For example, I remember as a boy, hearing that the streets of heaven were paved with gold, and that we would spend eternity worshiping around God's throne on our knees, and that there wouldn't be any more pain but God would dry all our tears. I couldn't help

but wonder, “Why would anybody need gold in heaven? And what good would gold-paved streets be?” Or “I can barely stand sitting in church for an hour. I’m going to have to sit in a church service that lasts *forever*? Won’t that be boring for us, and for God too? Wouldn’t God want us to run around and have some fun?” Or “If there is no pain, why would we be crying so that God would need to wipe away our tears?”

I now realize that those images were never meant to be taken literally. They were meant to give us comfort ... that even if we are poor in this life, our poverty won’t last forever ... that even if our lives here are filled with struggle, that struggle will be swallowed up in wonder and worship ... that our pain will end, and comfort and love will always be bigger than our suffering and sorrow.

Those images of heaven weren’t very appealing to a boy. The best I could say was that they were better than the images of hell that were used to scare us! But now I am convinced that even the biblical images of hell weren’t supposed to be taken literally. They were vivid and powerful imagery designed not to scare us, but to challenge us to wake up, stop doing what’s wrong, stop wasting our lives, and start living wisely and generously. (If you’re interested in a more in-depth exploration of the subject of afterlife in the Bible, you should check out my book *The Last Word and the Word After That* [Fortress Press, 2019]).

Over my years as a pastor, I’ve had some intense and poignant moments with people who were very close to dying, or who had just witnessed a dying. On more than one occasion, someone took my hand or seized my gaze and asked me, in simplest terms, what I thought it would be like on the other side. Of course I thought of Paul’s words – “No eye has seen, nor has any ear heard, nor any human heart imagined what God has prepared....”

I felt that the directness of their question was calling for a very personal and honest response from me. They were asking me, not simply as a pastor, but as a fellow human being who is also going to die someday. So in those holy moments, I tried to say something like this:

Tonight, I might go home and fall asleep and have a dream about you. In my dream, you would say things you’ve never said and do things you have never

done. What I know of you through my experience has created a version of you in my mind that, in a dream, can be activated and set free for a new existence.

Well, God's knowledge of you is infinitely more full than my knowledge of you. God remembers every dimension of every dimension of your existence, including those that are completely unknown to you. So the version of you that God holds in God's mind is the most real version of you anywhere. Not only is it accurate in this moment, but it is comprehensive across time.

I faintly understand this when I look at one of my adult children. When I look at one of my sons, for example, I see a man in his thirties, but I knew that face when it was wrinkly and fresh from the birth canal, and when it was giggling in the bathtub, and when it was focused on a soccer ball that could be kicked through a goal, and when it was blowing out birthday candles, and when it was beaming on graduation day, and when it was gazing into his own newborn's face. In a sense, when I look at my son in this moment, I can recall my son through all my moments with him. Again, I multiply that kind of knowledge by a million, billion times, and I begin to imagine what it is like to be known by God.

So, when the atoms and molecules that sustain my life on this earth stop upholding this mystery called life, when the chemical reactions slow and stop and my embodied life is over, I trust that I will be retained – saved, if you will, remembered like a computer saves data – in the loving mind of God. But of course, God is no computer: God is a creator. So just as I can set my knowledge of you free in a dream, I can imagine God setting God's knowledge of me alive in some new way beyond this life, in ways and through mechanisms that I can't begin to understand or even imagine.

And one more thing. When I think of one of my sons or daughters, I don't let his or her failures and faults dictate my view of him or her. I would never reduce my beloved child's life to his or her worst moments. Sadly, some people present God as if this were the case in God's dealings with us. No, because I love my kids, I interpret their failures and faults in light of their needs, their weaknesses, their struggles, and their maturity. And because I love my adult children, my understanding of their radiant strengths and glowing successes shine all the more brightly against the backdrop of their weaknesses.

I simply can't know my children apart from my love for them, and I believe it is the same with God – not only as God deals with me, but as God deals with every single human who ever lived. To be known by God, to be remembered by God, is to be immersed in beautiful love, beautiful saving, beautiful knowledge, beautiful justice, beautiful holiness, beautiful kindness, beautiful truth, beautiful wonder, all beautifully integrated. This is one of the many reasons Jesus is so important to me: I believe that the way Jesus looked at incomplete, wounded, needy people beautifully images the compassionate way in which God will always look at all of us. In the compassionate eyes and heart of Jesus, I see the kindness of God.

So when this body can no longer serve as the hardware to support the software of my life, I can trust that my complete program will be saved on God's software, so to speak. And I can trust that it will not only be stored there: it will be restored, reactivated, set free like a dream, set free to run and grow and live again. How that will happen I can't begin to imagine. I have no idea. That's why in the moment of my death, I want to let go of this life – with gratitude for all that has been - and trust myself to God – with hope for all that is to come.

So this is how I see my personal eschatology, my understanding of my own personal end and destiny. I don't need answers beyond this. I don't need certainty or even clarity. I don't need details. All I really need is a simple trust, that the goodness, grace, beauty, and kindness that have surrounded me in this life will continue on after my last breath.

Frederick Buechner's wise words come to mind, given at a commencement address at Union Seminary in Richmond. With God, I believe, every ending is a commencement:

The world is full of dark shadows, to be sure, both the world without and the world within ... But praise and trust [God] too for the knowledge that what's lost is nothing to what's found, and that all the dark there ever was, set next to light, would scarcely fill a cup.

I recently wrote a song that captures some of what I've shared here. I offer these lyrics for your reflection as you think about the gift of life, which includes the gift of death.

Echo

This day is a gift and what we do with it
Becomes the gift that carries on
When this day is gone.
A smile, a random act of kindness to a child
Who knows where a simple gift can go,
Like an echo...

Chorus: Isn't this what it's all about?
To savor the beauty and echo it out?
And learn from all the rest, and leave it behind ...
Isn't this why we're all here?
To echo and amplify out loud and clear
The goodness that we find?

This life is a gift and what we do with it
Becomes the gift that we pass on
When we pass on.
To feel a neighbor's hurt, to share a healing word,
To lift a stranger's load - each gift
Like an echo ...

Chorus

The universe began, they say, with a big bang
But another way to see it is a big original gift —
Original gift!
Across a billion galaxies, the gift resounds in moments like these,
New voices join the glorious crescendo,
And we echo

Isn't this what it's all about?
To savor the beauty and echo it out?
And learn from all the rest and leave it behind ...
Isn't this why we're all here?
To echo and amplify out loud and clear

The goodness that we find?

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