IN ALL SEASONS - Episode 8- On Death & Dying

Welcome to **IN ALL SEASONS**. I am Beverly Flanagan, your host on this podcast, for women like me, who love the Lord, in the second half of life.

We return to our perpetual question: How does **LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL** relate to our purpose in life? As women? As Christian women?

In this episode of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we will continue to talk about **LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL**. What Constitutes a **GOOD DEATH**? In addition to personal preparation, getting ready to meet the Lord, concerns about judgment, we have the hope of being welcomed to the Eternal Kingdom. How about practical matters, such as End-of-Life Planning? Advanced Directives? Having THE CONVERSATION with family, friends, those we leave behind? Getting our worldly affairs in order, leaving behind no messes for others?

What is a Good Death?

Dying well, or what constitutes a 'good' death will mean different things to us all. Our understanding is informed by a multitude of influences drawn from our individual journeys through life. But there are many universal questions.

If we think about death as a journey, not just as a specific moment, it may help us understand what it means to die well. But as with any journey, we need to prepare for it.

It might seem strange to think of death as something that we can ‘do well’. But, there are few things we would want more for ourselves and our loved ones than a good death.

If we are dying, it is likely that we will want to be at peace, as comfortable as possible and surrounded by those closest to us. We will probably want to die at home, and you will probably not want invasive treatment if it is clear that there would be little to gain from this.

A circle of support is important. Such a community might include (but is certainly not limited to) family and friends, caregivers, medics, a chaplain or a priest. This is relevant not just at the moment of death, but throughout the dying process. Having a community of accompaniment throughout the journey can help us to prepare by bringing consolation and spiritual peace.

Being with the people we know and love can bring comfort to our journey.

Recognizing our needs

A good death may involve reconciliation with God or family members.

But what if you have no faith and no loving family? This is a tough situation, and we may want to talk about this with a spiritual guide or chaplain, perhaps to convert, but perhaps to come to terms with who we are & what we truly believe.

The journey towards death

The journey towards death is as much about getting to know ourselves as any part of life. Learning to recognize our needs – be they medical, emotional or spiritual – is something that may become more acute when we are closer to death. Being able to identify these needs is another central part of what it means to die well.

A good death… means letting go. I repeat, a good death... means letting go.

Death is the moment to witness to life and to witness to trust in God. It may be the moment to discover our true faith & that we truly do trust in God & want to be with Him.

What is death like?

In years gone by, when most people died at home, death was part of daily life. Today, when most people die in hospitals or care homes, many of us may never have seen a person die. If we're dying, understanding more about what might

happen in the final weeks and days may calm some of our fears, as well as those of our family.

Everyone will have a different experience of dying – it's part of what makes us unique. When we have a terminal illness, there will come a time when we start thinking more about the actual process of dying and the moments of death, and what they will be like. These are things which we may have been putting off thinking about, but we might find that talking with our family, friends and care team about the process of dying will help to reassure us and take away some of the fears or worries we may have.

Planning a good death

In the Christian faith it is believed that life is a precious gift from God and death simply opens the way to new life. Planning ahead can help to overcome fear and anxiety. Perhaps it is possible to take the sting out of death and encourage acceptance of it as a part of life itself. We know that Christ, by His Death & Resurrection, has victory over death, and that we, who belong to Him, do too.

"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come to pass: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" I Corinthians 15:54-55.

How do we begin to plan for a good death? There is a lot to think about and the task might seem daunting at first. It's likely that we will think about the process of dying, our loved ones and how we will be remembered. Even for someone not religious, there may be thoughts about God and life after death.

Helping people to die well, including ourselves

Dying is a natural part of life, and it's important to be open and honest about it. But it's also about choosing the right time to talk. Each person, caregiver or care recipient, should have information given at the time and in the detail when it seems right for them.

What's my legacy?

Of course, we can begin to plan for a good death when we are fit and healthy. From making a will to planning our funeral, this involves thinking about our legacy and how we would like to be remembered.

Like most difficult decisions, finding the right people to talk to can often be the first step towards making these choices easier. Speaking to an attorney about making a will or a funeral director about planning our funeral can put our minds at rest and gives us some guidance about the decisions we need to make.

Planning ahead

A will sets in place what will happen to our belongings after we die. If we are a parent, it is also about appointing a guardian for the children, if they are not of age. We can make one at any age, and it can always be changed and updated according to our circumstances. It can also help to avoid any potential disputes among our family or friends.

Even if we are do not own a home or have other valuable assets, it is worth making a will to protect our digital possessions. We need to think about our sign-ins and log-ons and passwords, as those we leave behind may need access to our personal information, such as banking, bills, and insurance. We may have other digital assets such as photograph and music collections and we may want to curate our social media presence, like our FaceBook or LinkedIn pages.

It may also help our family if we prepare a document with details of our bank accounts, pension, energy and water providers, and whatever else we can think of.

Making a living will

You may have heard of people making a ‘living will’. This is something very different to the will we make about our material belongings. A living will is a document in which we state our wishes about our medical treatment and our care in case there comes a time when we are not able to express these ourselves. A living will usually refers to Advance Care Planning.

What goes into an advance care plan?

Stating preferences about our care is part of what is known as advance care planning. This is a written record of how we would like to be treated when we are

incapacitated- as when we are under anesthesia or perhaps have dementia, very ill, or dying.

Advance care plans can help the people looking after us to make informed decisions, and ensure that people close to us are involved and informed about our care.

A plan will usually cover health care and we may want to state where we would like to be cared for, for example at home, at a hospice or in a hospital. We may want to include what food we are given or how we are dressed.

Regularly review the advance care plan

We can make changes to our plan at any time and we will usually be encouraged to review it regularly and to share updated versions with our caregivers and loved ones.

Planning your spiritual care

The medical profession talks about “end of life care” but Christians believe death is the gateway to a new life with God.

As Christians, we will want to let our caregivers know about our spiritual needs and we may include these in our advance care plan. We may, for instance, want to mention religious books objects you would like to have next to you such as a Bible, a crucifix or a rosary.

One way to continue to help people after we have died is by becoming an organ donor. Before deciding, find out what this involves and discuss it with those closest to you.

Keeping memories alive

There are several ways to keep our memories of you alive after our death.

One idea is to make an audio or video recording of our life stories, or a statement of our values & how we feel about things. Another idea is to make a memory book or box of memories. This could bring together photographs, special messages and cards, theatre programs or other items that trigger happy memories of events and celebrations.

Spiritual planning

Talking to a priest, chaplain or anyone who might be able to give spiritual guidance can be helpful when trying to plan and understand the spiritual side of death.

Death is personal. Ultimately, we each have to prepare for your own death. But we don't have to make these plans alone. We do a lot of planning for the arrival of a new life before and during pregnancy, but we don't often like to think about death. The more we are able to accept death and talk about it, the easier it will be to plan good and better deaths.

Planning the funeral

Funerals are a time of mixed emotions. We will probably want to say goodbye to our loved one, spend time grieving, and celebrate their life, but there can also be a rush to get things organized in the days immediately following a death. We'd never plan a wedding or a birth like this, so why should it be different for funerals?

Why funeral planning is important

Planning an event is usually an enjoyable process because we often have something to look forward to at the end of it. Planning our funeral might then seem slightly odd or surreal, but in some ways it also means that we are still able to participate in it.

No matter what our age or health, it is hard to think about our own death. If we have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, then our funeral will probably seem a lot closer, but this doesn't necessarily make it any easier.

Music, readings and prayers usually form a big part of the funeral service. If you have specific ideas about choices, it might be a good idea to keep a note of them and to tell a close relative or friend where they can find this document. Thinking about our favorite hymns or songs might also be a way of easing the process of funeral planning.

Providing great care

Caring for the dying is about more than physical care; it's also about looking out for and addressing spiritual needs. Being a caregiver involves becoming aware of the complex needs of those who are dying, and of those who have been bereaved.

Dying in a caring context

Until recently, hospice & palliative care was a neglected area of medicine. But there is growing recognition that there often comes a stage in a patient's treatment when the emphasis needs to shift from cure to care. The support given to a dying patient can help them make the most of the time they have left, and to prepare for a good death.

Deathbed Etiquette

Being by the bedside of someone you love who is dying isn't easy. Things that are helpful include- Holding the dying person's hand, and being aware of important last conversations, like saying "thank you" or "I love you". Playing gentle background music or creating some personal space around a loved one's bed, particularly if they are in hospital, can be comforting. Practical tips, such as reminding the person keeping vigil to take regular breaks to drink and eat and to set up an email or social media group to keep family and friends updated. Being aware of some common but unexpected aspects of dying – that people sometimes "choose" to die when their loved ones are out of the room; that their breathing pattern might change or sound labored; or that they might need "permission" to let go.

Coping with bereavement and grief

The loss of a loved one is often one of the most traumatic experiences you can have. Whether the bereavement was expected or sudden, taking in the reality is no easy task. While life will never be the same again, over time and with the right support, a new future is possible.

In the next episode of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we are going to talk about how does **LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL** relate to a **LEAVING A LEGACY**? What is a Legacy"? How do we know what it is? And how do we create one? And not merely our financial legacy, which is important, but also our values, to those we leave behind. Our stories, our desires to make a difference through our finances & our values. How

do we want to be remembered? How do these topics relate to our beliefs as Christians? As women? As Christian women?

For those who were with us in Episode 3, on Mature Women in the Bible, we talked about

This is Beverly Flanagan, signing off for today, and thank you for joining me on **IN ALL SEASONS,** for women like me, who love the Lord, in the second half of life!