

# Contents

Introduction

The Do-It-Yourself Approach

Evidence for Life After Death

The Bible on Life After Death

Facing the Final Moments

A Lesson In How to Die

Your Assurance of Heaven

Notes

## Coming to Grips with **DEATH AND DYING**

**D**uring the last few months of her struggle with cancer, Jacquelyn Helton kept a diary. Her thoughts and feelings would become a legacy for her husband, Tom, and her eighteen-month-old daughter, Jennifer.

In her diary she wonders what death would be like. What clothes should she wear for burial? She thinks of her daughter. *Who will love her? Put her to sleep?* In her writings she tells Jennifer that when it hurts she should remember that her mother would have cared. Then she thinks of her husband and the needs he will have after she is gone.

Finally she cries out, "What is the matter with you, God? My family is not a bunch of Boy Scouts who can figure all these things out for themselves—you're some kind of idiot to pull something like this!"<sup>1</sup>

Denial, anger, fear, depression, and helpless resignation—all of these

feelings erupt in the souls of those who face death. No matter that death is common to the human race; each person must face this ultimate humiliation individually. Friends and family can walk only as far as the curtain; the dying one must disappear behind the veil alone.

Tom Howard says that when we face death we are like a hen before a cobra, incapable of doing anything at all in the presence of the very thing that seems to call for the most drastic and decisive action. "There is, in fact, nothing we can do," he writes. "Say what we will, dance how we will, we will soon enough be a heap of ruined feathers and bones, indistinguishable from the rest of the ruins that lie about. It will not appear to matter in the slightest whether we met the enemy with equanimity, shrieks, or a trumped-up gaiety, *there we will be.*"

Yet, some people believe that the almost universal fear of death is unfounded. When actor Michael Landon, of TV's "Little House on the Prairie" and "Bonanza," lay on his deathbed, he confided to friends that he saw a "bright white light" that eased his fears and made him look forward to what awaited him on the other side. He died calmly, anticipating what he called "quite an experience."

Hollywood is obsessed with the theme of death. In 1991 at least a

dozen movies dealt with the hereafter. Reincarnation, altered states of consciousness, and glad reunions in a metaphysical place such as heaven are popular themes at the box office. Larry Gordon, chief executive of Largo Entertainment, says, "People are looking for something that makes them feel good. We all want to believe that death isn't so bad."<sup>2</sup>

Hell fire has been supplanted by blissful feelings about a hereafter where everyone ends happily reunited. There is no judgment, no careful review of one's life. Death has mystery but is not to be feared. Given this positive assessment of the Great Beyond we should not be surprised that some people want to hasten their arrival at this destination.

This booklet is written to answer several questions about death and dying:

- Is suicide a reasonable option in the face of prolonged emotional or physical suffering?
- How should we interpret the paranormal experiences that seem to confirm life after death?
- How can a Christian receive comfort in view of his/her impending death?
- What role should grief play in dealing with death?

- What can we learn about how to die from Christ's example?

Above all, *Coming to Grips with Death and Dying* is a booklet of hope, a scriptural discussion of how a Christian can witness the faithfulness of God while facing death.

Before we investigate this message of comfort, however, we must expose some false contemporary ideas about the hereafter.

### **THE DO-IT-YOURSELF APPROACH**

The suffering that often precedes death is so excruciating that many people hope to leapfrog over the process of dying to get to death itself. Books explaining how to commit suicide are selling briskly; a growing number of people want to "control their own destinies" rather than be at the mercy of modern medicine.

The best-selling book *Final Exit*, by Derek Humphry, is a death manual loaded with charts of lethal dosages for eighteen prescription drugs and sleeping tablets. It includes information about asphyxiation and auto exhaust. Practical tips on how to make sure no one will suspect that you are taking your life are also included. The author's intention is to help individuals commit suicide without fear of botching the attempt.

One argument for assisting in death is that medical technology has artificially prolonged life. Modern medicine sometimes *has* gone too far in keeping people alive long after any hope of recovery is past. However, the idea that we all have the right to “die with dignity” is based on a false premise. If taken seriously by society in general, it would lead to disastrous consequences.

Strictly speaking, no one “dies with dignity.” Ever since sin entered the world and brought death with it, death has always been the final humiliation, the one unalterable fact that confirms our mortality and reduces our bodies (yes, even beautiful ones) to ashes.

Jesus Himself hung on a cross naked, exposed to the gawkers that walked by outside the walls of Jerusalem. Thankfully, none of us will likely have to endure such shameful public torture, but death is never pretty. Death is the ultimate affirmation that we are but dust and to dust we shall return.

Those who choose suicide (for whatever reason) should remember that physical death is not the end, but a doorway to an eternal existence. Sadly, some who find the pain of dying intolerable will awaken in a realm that is even more terrible, more fright-