

On the other hand, those who have simply despaired of life or are afraid to pray for healing may also leave the sick or dying with a similar sense of isolation. Their fate is prematurely sealed by fatalism, and they are abandoned to their disease and despair. **Either error can be worse than dying!**

But what if we *don't* need to discern when it is time to *surrender* a loved one *to dying* because instead, we can always surrender them *into the care of Christ*, both in life and in death?

As Christ-followers, we never need to surrender to disease, dying or death because our surrender is always, only to God. We don't need to calculate our transition from fight-mode against disease into acquiescence to dying. And we don't decide when it's time to despair because we never do.

Rather, we live in constant surrender. We offer our healthy children and our ailing loved ones into God's care *at all times*. We surrender dying friends and family into God's care—as we always have—with an openness and expectancy that “surrender to God's care” always gives them (1) the best odds of a divine healing or a medical success, while also (2) enjoying the peace of God's loving presence whether they battle disease or undergo dying.

PRESENCE: A MORE LIFE-GIVING PATH

A healthy path through life's “final portal” begins with “presence.” As caregivers, we begin with *our compassionate presence* in their situation, to their pain, to their needs. And we continue *embodying “God's felt presence”* throughout, whether the journey leads to healing or becomes the pathway of dying in God's arms. The way we practice this presence is through attention, openness and receptivity to the presence of Emmanuel—*God with us*.

When we have practiced that posture of surrender, presence and expectancy, we occasionally see a dramatic healing. But more importantly, if we can stay present and attentive to the sick and dying AND to God's nearness, *the dying don't feel abandoned*. We'll avoid heaping shame or striving onto the unhealed and their loved ones.

We need not flip-flop between fighting and despair, because *it's all about surrender to the embrace of both human and divine presence*. More than that, *we need not worry about whether death or dying are enemies or friends*. *Instead*, we focus on the presence of the living Christ with us through every experience. □

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Memory Albums

Bradley Jersak with Wm. Paul Young

Do you ever have trouble remembering good things about someone? You know there had to be some good in them, but it feels impossible to recall a single instance. This is especially true of someone we were close to after they hurt us. Maybe it was an abusive parent or a spouse who betrayed us. Remembering good things might even feel unjust, a self-betrayal in the shadow of harms they did. It's a sure sign that some part of us still needs healing.

Our friend, Paul Young (author of *The Shack*), shared a profound insight. When we experience repeated traumas from those we rely on, we begin to create a memory album—snapshots of their offences. Each episode is stored and accumulated in this “record of wrongs.”

Meanwhile, any kindness or service they do feels like a lie, so we set those memories aside in a second album and forbid ourselves from opening it. To do so creates confusion and double binds. Those memories threaten the consistent narrative we create for our offender. But the choice to close “the good album” imprisons us in the trauma of the pain album.

Paul had sincerely forgiven his fundamentalist father for the rage and violence he experienced as a child and they had reconciled to a great degree. But I don't recall hearing any good stories about him. To me, he just sounded like a monster. Then one night, as Paul surrendered his dad into God's loving care, something changed. He caught a glimpse of the other photo album and refused to turn away. He lay awake all night as our Papa God (as Paul calls him) flooded him with memory photos of dad—venturing into a snowstorm to help someone, being a good storyteller, praying constantly for those who betrayed him, and working hard to overcome his own history so Paul received these memories.

When Paul shared these beautiful stories with me, it felt like he was describing another man—virtually a saint! How was this possible? Grace flowed as Paul became willing to see that good doesn't erase evil, but it does overcome and redeem it! He didn't have to deny the sorrow of the first album, but the goodness of God in the second album offered the gift of cleansing tears and a redeemed memory.