

Question: My doctor told me that I have a rare disease with no known cure and this may be my last year to live. I don't feel afraid, but I do have some regrets. What would Jesus do?

To learn that you may be in the last year of your life is certainly a very sobering situation. Some people would drown themselves in sorrow and give up before it became necessary. Others would live their final days with reckless abandonment trying to fulfill every fantasy that has ever come to mind. But I believe Jesus would have us see this as a rare opportunity to prepare for a new life with the heavenly father. At the same time, we can also be a blessing to others around us by facing this news with an eternal faith. We may be able to help others learn how to face their own mortality.

Because none of us knows the length of time he or she has left, I believe that Jesus would encourage us at this stage of life to examine our relationship with God. If a person has not yet committed his or her life to God, that commitment is the place to begin. A spirit of repentance for sins and the confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is essential. In the words of Paul, bury the old person of sin in baptism and then be raised to a new life now and forever: "For if we have been raised with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:1-5). In this new life, God should be the top priority. Through prayer, time with God's word, fellowship with his other children of faith and by serving others it is possible to develop a joyous anticipation of living in his presence eternally.

Another important part of building a strong relationship with God is making every possible effort to make things right with our fellow human beings. The apostle John wrote, "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24 NIV). Do not allow pride to hinder you from saying, "I'm sorry, forgive me." Do not allow anything to keep you from going to anyone who may have offended you and offering your full forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15).

In addition, I believe that Jesus would encourage us to spend as much time as possible with our loved ones. Just as Jesus provided for his mother by placing her in the care of the beloved disciple John (John 19:26-27), we should do what we can to provide for the welfare of our families (1 Timothy 5:8). Share special memories from the past. Talk of important values that have been learned in life. By this means, we can leave a legacy of faith that can bless our families long after we have left this life.

We should not worry that we may not be able to accomplish all we would like in our final days. When we make things right with God, we are living in his wonderful grace. His grace is more than adequate for anything we are not able to get done. When we trust in Jesus, we can rejoice in the fact that he loves us and those we may leave behind. He will take care of us and our loved ones.

In reality, we should all live as if every day is our last. For those who live by faith in Christ, going home to be with the Lord will be the greatest possible moment one could ever experience. The apostle Paul said: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (Philippians 1:21-24). What a wonderful hope Christian faith gives us!

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