Navigating Life’s Final Chapters
Facing Mortality while Living with Advanced Cancer

“I cannot escape death, but at least I can escape the fear of it.”
- Epictetus, Greek Philosopher

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Thinking and talking about death and mortality is difficult.

And, it is important.
A Mindful Moment
The Analysis of death is not for the sake of becoming fearful but to appreciate this precious lifetime.

- Dalai Lama
ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Common Thoughts & Emotions

- Fluctuate between feelings of distress and feelings of normalcy
- Can be very stressful
- Sleep disruptions and trouble concentrating
- Includes intense sadness & anxiety - easily triggered
- Fear, irritability, anger, guilt, confusion
- Living with uncertainty
- Loneliness/Isolation/Lack of motivation
- Remember/acknowledge other losses
- Imagine what death will be like
ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Allows us to

- **Confront fears** and feelings, rather than avoid them – and seek support
- **Closure**: Deal with unfinished business – practical, logistical, and emotional
- **Settle differences**: Clarify misunderstandings or express what should have been said. Attempt to heal relationships.
- **Let go**: Say good-byes
- **Connect**: Memories & “continuing bonds”.
- **Another way to express love**.
- **Prepare & plan**: Anticipate problems that need to be solved & address future hopes and needs – legacy work

All types of grief open a portal about what matters most and invites us to bravely examine our fears about it.
DYING

Evaluating beliefs
What we have learned about dying
Holding a spiritual perspective
Healing our suffering
Facing our greatest fears
Acknowledging our feelings when someone else we care about dies
Communicating our wishes
Teaching others through your experience
Life review
WHAT WE BELIEVE
ABOUT LIFE, SELF &
DEATH

Death is a failure.  *It’s not fair!*
It’s not OK to be angry at God.
I’ll be in a better place.
Positive yielding vs. do everything to stay alive
We can beat death with enough effort.
Suffering is necessary to atone for my sins.
It’s not okay to talk about death because:
  • it will make it happen sooner
  • it means we have given up
When my soul leaves my body, I’ll be set free.
I’ve had a good life.  It’s just my time.
If birth is a miracle, could death be a miracle, too?

What beliefs have affected your experience?
How did you formulate these beliefs?
Whose voice is speaking?
# PREFERENCES AND PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>PREPARATION</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>CHOICE</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“What will it be like?”</td>
<td>Advance Directives: Living Will MPOA*, MOST, Five Wishes form Will / Estate Planning Legacy Projects Funeral planning Obituary</td>
<td>Family Friends Caregivers Palliative Care Hospice Death Doula</td>
<td>Providers Pain management Spiritual Ritual Favorite things Roles</td>
<td>Where do you want to be? Home/Room Family’s home Other Location</td>
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<td>Explore choices: <em>Conversation Project</em></td>
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<td>Communicate preferences &amp; needs</td>
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*Hospice limitations
“When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

- Fred Rogers

WHO CAN HELP

LOVED ONES
Spouse/Partner
Family, Pet(s)
Close Friends

MEDICAL TEAM
Doctor, Nurse,
Social Worker, Counselor

SPIRITUAL ADVISORS
Priest, Rabbi, Deacon, Minister,
Chaplain, Healing Practitioner

OTHERS
Friends – Old & New
Peers, Colleagues
Chance Encounters
Therapists/Counselors
Hospice / Death Doulas
Today, you are alive!
How do you want to live until you die?
What drives your desire to live?
Advocate for yourself and your needs
What are your priorities?
• How does your life reflect and honor them?
• Where’s the gap?
• Growth Mindset: Learn new insights and strategies for healing and growth

We cannot control the matter or timing of our death, but we can choose how we approach it.
WHY WE LIVE

To experience everything:

- Love, learning, joy, awe, creativity, connection, appreciation
- Learning to live in between these experiences
  - Life lessons and reality checks
  - Each a building block of your character, knowledge, and emotional resilience guiding you through tough times.

Yes, and even the opposite of that:

- Sadness, grief, loss, pain
- Life isn’t about avoiding suffering

- Learn what it means to be human
- To be of service and part of something bigger

What makes your life worth living?
# LIVING a MEANINGFUL LIFE

## VALUES & PRIORITIES

**WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT & MATTERS MOST NOW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSONAL</th>
<th>SOCIAL / EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>CAREER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships/Family</td>
<td>• Favorite places &amp; things</td>
<td>• Who are you beyond your career/ or job?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Forgiveness</td>
<td>• Nature</td>
<td>• What is your work now?</td>
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<td>• Happiness</td>
<td>• Travel</td>
<td>• Commitment to Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Humor/Laughter/Joy</td>
<td>• Adventures</td>
<td>• Shared Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Self-care/compassion</td>
<td>• Generosity</td>
<td>• Contributions, how you (your work) mattered</td>
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<td>• Stress relief</td>
<td>• Celebrations</td>
<td>• Relationships with co-workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meditation</td>
<td>• Opportunities for joy, gratitude, and awe</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Good books</td>
<td>• Leaving a legacy</td>
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<td>• Good food</td>
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<td>• Hobbies</td>
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I forgive people but that doesn't mean I accept their behavior or trust them. I forgive them for me, so I can let go and move on with my life.
From the moment you were born, your death has walked beside you. Though it seldom shows its face, you still feel its empty touch when fear invades your life, or what you love is lost or inner damage is incurred…

Yet when destiny draws you into these spaces of poverty, and your heart stays generous until some door opens into the light, you are quietly befriending your death; so that you will have no need to fear
That the silent presence of your death would call your life to attention, wake you up to how scarce your time is and to the urgency to become free and equal to the call of your destiny.

That you would gather yourself and decide carefully how you now can live the life you would love to look back on from your deathbed.

For Death by John O’Donohue
CULTIVATING PEACE

LIVE WITH INTENTION

• Be authentic – be true to yourself
• Open / Curious
• Self-compassion / Self-trust
• Be with people you like/love – spend meaningful time with them
• Reminisce: share stories & memories
• Remind yourself that you can do hard things
• Express Gratitude/Appreciation
• Release regret, shame, and resentment
• Live your bucket list

CONNECT WITH SPIRIT & SELF

• Connect to our essence and each other – Feel/be touched by another
• Awareness – listen patiently to yourself
• Insights about what wholeness and healing means
• Prayer / Meditation / Attention
• Be in nature / gardens
• Be present now
• Accept what is vs. resist
• Let go of what you can’t control

Do one thing a day that brings you joy!
As I wept
in the arms of darkness,
I heard the voice of my grandmother say,
Nothing stays the same, darling,
not even pain.
Life is a path of change.
Of ecstasy and ache.
So, no matter what the storm claims
let love light the way.

Tanya Markul, The She Book
SUMMARY

Dying is a part of life, and it is still hard to talk about.
• And so is grief.

State your preferences and do what you can to honor them. Make a plan.

Live fully while you are living; do what matters most.

Heal your emotional suffering; it is possible to make peace with it.

Do/say what is necessary to help you say good-bye with grace. (Love, gratitude/appreciation, & forgiveness)

Explore strategies that offer comfort and relief from your pain, suffering and sadness.

Thoughtfully cultivate peace. Know you’re loved.
THANK YOU!

LET’S EXPLORE YOUR QUESTIONS

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Presentation slides will be provided to you after this webinar.
Please complete the program evaluation using this link:
NLFC Evaluation
I pray that you will have the blessing of being consoled and sure about your death. May you know in your soul there is no need to be afraid. When your time comes, may you have every blessing and strength you need. May there be a beautiful welcome for you in the home you are going to. You are not going somewhere strange, merely back to the home you have never left.

May you live with compassion and transfigure everything negative within you and about you. When you come to die, may it be after a long life. May you be tranquil among those who care for you. May your going be sheltered and your welcome assured. May your soul smile in the embrace of your Anam Cara.

*Entering Death*, by John O'Donohue
May you be happy.

*May you know your worth.*

May you live with ease.

*May you be free of suffering.*

May you find peace.
HELPFUL RESOURCES

**BOOKS/WORKBOOKS**

- Levine, Stephen. *A Year to Live*
- O’Donohue, John. *To Bless the Space Between Us*. 2008
- Rosenbaum, Elana. *Here for Now: Living Well with Cancer through Mindfulness* (MBSR)

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

- [Advance Care Planning & Forms](#) (Colorado)
  - Includes a flowchart to help determine what documents are right for you
- [Colorado Advance Directives Consortium](#)
- [Colorado End of Life Options Act (MAID)](#)
  - *End of Life conversations can be hard, but your loved ones will thank you*. (article)
- [Five Wishes](#)
- [The Conversation Project](#) - Communicating wishes for care through the end of life
- [What’s Your Grief](#) - support resource for anyone experiencing any type of loss, including the loss of a loved one
OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

MEDICAL AID IN DYING

- **Colorado End of Life Options Act**
- **Compassion and Choices**
  - CO EOL Option

ORGAN, EYE. TISSUE & BODY DONATION*

- **American Transplant Foundation**
- **Donate Life Colorado**
- **Donor Alliance** (Colorado)
- **OncoLink** (Cancer patient donor info)
- **American Association for Anatomy**
  - Guidelines
- **Donating your body to Science in Colorado**
  - Registration and info packet

*As a general rule, cancer survivors are not eligible to be living donors. However, the transplant team may review, on a case-by-case basis, and determine that the donor is cancer-free, that the needed organs have not sustained damage from prior cancer treatment, etc