



6 Thoughts About Redefining Hope

For many terminally ill patients, hope can take on a new meaning, a renewed sense of appreciation of life and its simple pleasures. As patients learn to live with dying, they are given the opportunity to become more fully alive in the present moment. They may come to measure days in terms of the quality of life rather than quantity. The point is there is still much to live for. Even the dying have tasks to complete. Borrowing from the author of "Dying Well," those tasks can be described as follows:

1. **Completing one's worldly affairs.** This might include arranging finances, writing an advance directive, and making closure with the circle of people and institutions outside of their ring of intimate friends and relations.
2. **Coming to terms with the meaning of one's life.** They may wish to write a review of their life or dictate it to a friend or hospice volunteer. This is an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate accomplishments.
3. **Forgiving oneself.** In the course of a lifetime, all of us will have made mistakes. During a life review, a patient may identify things to make amends and allow the grace of forgiveness for what cannot be changed about the past.
4. **Resolving family relationships.** In making closure in an intimate circle, a patient may need to ask for forgiveness from some or extend forgiveness to others. When faced with the possibility of never seeing each other again, we often recognize that the relationship is more important than any grudges that have developed over the years.
5. **Accepting the truth of our interdependence.** Self sufficient as we like to be, the fact is we all need each other. None of us is an island. In the course of living, most likely we have helped others. In the course of life's end, we most likely will need help ourselves. An important lesson in the final weeks and days is to learn to be dependent and accept help.
6. **Approaching transcendence.** As people prepare to die, they often find solace in spirituality and the concept of a Being or Entity larger than themselves. Many come to an understanding of the fundamental unity of all life as well as a gratifying feeling that they will be merging with this larger Essence.

Coping with a terminal illness calls all involved to reexamine their priorities. Rather than resign to a hopeless no-man's land of despair, patients and family caregivers often discover that the last few months can be filled with deep love, growth, and grace.