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# Gleanings

## Tribute to a Friend



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In the nearly ten years that I have been writing the *Gleanings Newsletter*, only one time have I dedicated a newsletter to honor a deceased person. That occasion was the passing of my father in April 2008. The May 2008 newsletter was written as a tribute to him.

This past month I received the news that one of my clients, Monte Merrill, died. The news of his passing was stunning and shocking. How could this be? He was a relatively young man at forty-two years of age. Monte had no known health issues and was not overweight; he exercised and watched his diet. Nevertheless, on Tuesday, February 9, 2010, a massive heart attack ended his physical life.

The question is why? Why would God take a man who was maturing and growing so well and was about to enter the prime of his life? A man devoted to living a biblical worldview in every area of life. A man who had made such wonderful progress in his marriage and family. A man who had resuscitated a broken company from the brink of collapse and restored it to a growing, successful enterprise by applying biblical principles. A man who was a respected leader in his church and community. A man who, alongside his wife, Heather, was a refuge of hope and healing for so many. Why did he have to die of a massive heart attack so prematurely?

The question is vexing and, from a human perspective, there is no satisfying answer, but if we look at it from God's perspective, perhaps we can find at least some comfort and solace.

Let's begin by noting that God's view of death is very different from ours. When the Lord declared that His thoughts and ways are different from ours, He meant it (Isaiah 55:7-8).

Consider God's view of the death of His people as expressed in Psalms 116:15:

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

Few of us view death as something precious. We humans generally view it as something bad; in fact, we view it as very bad. It creates a variety of emotions in us, mostly negative, such as shock, dread, depression, fear, and anger, just to name a few. But to God, the Creator of all things, including each human being, death is not something bad. It simply marks the end of our earthly journey and our entrance to the next phase of life. Remember the words Jesus spoke to Martha regarding the death of her brother Lazarus:

*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. — John 11:25*

Physical death is not the end, it is not to be dreaded, but rather it is simply a door, an entrance into the next life for those who know Christ.

To further support God's optimistic view of physical death, note what Christ said, as recorded in Luke 12:4-5:

*I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*

Physical death should hold no fear for us. However, we should fear the eternal punishment of hell, also known as the "second death" and "lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15).

Consider also what the apostle Paul said about physical death. Note his words in Philippians 1:21:

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*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

How could Paul view physical death as better than physical life, particularly if he was living for Christ? Clearly, Paul had matured to the point where he viewed physical death as God did—not as something bad, but as a transition to something even more precious than walking with Christ while on earth, actually being in the presence of Christ.

Hence, from a biblical perspective, physical death is not something to dread or fear; it is part of God's creation. Physical death marks the end of our assignment here on earth and the beginning phase of the next life.

If we embrace a biblical view of physical death, then we can see that God's assignment for Monte on earth was concluded. Those who knew and loved him will miss him, but we can take comfort in the truth that God has a plan and purpose for both the physical birth and physical death of everyone. God determines our beginning and our end according to His sovereign pleasure (Isaiah 46:9–11). Furthermore, as His humble servants, we have no right to protest His sovereign will.

So with sadness, sobriety, and humility, I say goodbye to Monte—for now. And I say thank you, Monte, for the example that you left us.

To help us process this loss, consider some lessons we can learn from Monte's life so that we can live more faithfully for the Lord until our divinely appointed exit time arrives.

- *The importance of a solid marriage.* For those called to marriage, which applies to most of us, our marriage is the foundation from which we live our lives. How we relate to our spouses is a picture of how we relate to God. Monte learned this lesson and was faithful to continually seek to grow in his relationship with Heather.
- *The importance of a biblical worldview of work.* When Monte retained my consulting services, he was reeling from the competitive pressure due to the entrance of Lowes and Home Depot into his market. This business stress drove him to participate in the Business Leadership School sponsored by Strategic Christian Services and also to be involved in some of my training venues. From these, he learned a biblical view of business, which he faithfully applied. As a result, his business, which was on the verge of collapse, emerged with new strength and focus providing wonderful personalized service to his customers that neither Lowes nor Home Depot could offer.
- *The importance of spiritual food.* Monte was very committed to growing spiritually. To do this, he knew that he must feed on spiritual food. Without hesitation, he invested his time, talent, and treasure in spiritual food. In addition to the BLS training and the training of Strategies@Work, he recently attended a two-week school where he learned how to minister to people through healing prayer. Few people would take two weeks out of their lives and pay the fee to do this.
- *The importance of helping others.* Monte and Heather were very generous with their resources—their time, talent, and treasure. Frequently they would invite hurting people to stay in their home for weeks and even months at a time. While in their home, these people received loving nurturing care and a call to biblically based living. Furthermore, frequently Monte and Heather sacrificially gave so others could attend training events and receive precious spiritual food. Undoubtedly Monte and Heather experienced the reality that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).
- *The importance of perseverance.* Though Monte clearly grew, it was not easy. There were many battles along the way, but he never gave up. His resolve and determination to stay the course were admirable. He never abandoned his commitment to the Lord and a biblical worldview. Through this perseverance, he conquered much and gained many victories.

There is no doubt that I am a better man for knowing Monte Merrill. And just as I had the privilege of teaching him, he taught me.

During the rest of my life, I will miss him, but I will see him again. I think the words King David spoke regarding the death of his first son by Bathsheba are appropriate to describe my feelings about Monte's passing. "I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23).

When Monte passed through physical death and met the Lord, I have no doubt that he was able to say what Jesus said: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Monte had completed his race, although neither he nor anyone else knew it until February 9. And I know that when Monte reported for duty in heaven that he heard the words spoken to the faithful servant in the parable of the minas, "Well done, my good servant! . . . Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities" (Luke 19:17). I am confident that Monte will be ruling ten cities in the age to come.

Well done, my friend, you will be missed!

\*Scripture is taken from the New International Version.



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