

How can I face terminal illness with peace?



Gerard Chrispin

DayOne

Why this booklet is not easy for me to write



This booklet really is not easy for me to write.

I picture you, the reader, as someone facing the issue of terminal illness either for yourself or for a loved one or friend.

I do not just want to say the usual things people say. I want this to come across as real and to be truly helpful to you.

I have sat with loved ones as their lives have ebbed out and spent time with others moving towards the end of their journey.

I myself have a form of blood cancer. Although, as I write this booklet I feel fine, I know what the possibilities are. That makes me want, even more, to write something relevant and that really makes a difference.

Not somehow, but triumphantly

A Christian friend of mine was diagnosed with terminal cancer soon after he lost his wife. Naturally, he was saddened by his wife's death and grieved over it as you would expect.

But there was something different about his acceptance of both his bereavement and his terminal illness.

He put on his mantelpiece a card that simply said, *Not somehow, but triumphantly*. He then lived it out. His sadness and growing weakness seemed to emphasize his personal peace and even his quiet joy.



Like him, you and I can experience God's overcoming blessing and help, no matter what lies ahead, if our personal trust is in Jesus Christ.

I want to be sensitive. Please forgive me where I fail, but some difficult points do need to be raised. Facing them, even if painful, can lead you to experiencing peace under God's gracious hand.

We all face suffering

Someone once said that the ultimate statistic is that one person in one will die.

Like a line of passengers in an airport departure lounge, we all know our turn will come. The sands of time will run out. In that sense, we *all* will face illness that will claim our lives, even if we are currently in good health and even if it comes very suddenly.

Knowing *now* that you are ill should help you focus on life's brevity sooner than you thought. But whether we realize it or not, we all have an ultimate appointment to keep.

The Bible says that human life is like a breath or a shadow. Healthy people can easily ignore that reality.

Strangely, facing the fact of death can be a big advantage and lead to personal blessing, once the initial shock of a diagnosed illness has passed. That is true also for those seeing a loved one suffer serious illness.



Facing the facts

Naturally, no one likes to be ill. For some, death is a taboo subject. But facing these facts can be liberating. Let me illustrate this from the lives of two young people who have faced the facts of their illnesses and now enjoy far greater blessings in heaven.

One senior hospital nurse (not a Christian) once spoke about a 19-year-old young man in her care. Not long after turning to Christ as his Saviour, he unexpectedly learned that he had only two months to live. The nurse said she had never seen *such a determination to live, but such a readiness to die*. He was facing the facts. He was ready and at peace. He died joyfully. Centuries earlier, the apostle Paul was also facing death. He said, *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*.

Georgina was a successful young businesswoman. When diagnosed with cancer, she continued running marathons (a little slower). She was outward looking and cared for others. Her motto was: *I do not want to live dying, I want to die living*. She did that because she lived her life for Christ. She, too, had faced the facts. Her funeral was like a wedding, despite obvious natural sadness for her family and many friends. God gave each of them His help and grace. He promises that to all who trust Christ personally.



A surprise for the doctor!

Billy Bray was a legendary Cornish tin miner and rough street brawler. He was radically changed when Christ entered his life.

In later life, he fell ill and chose to go to the doctor who had a reputation for not beating about the bush. After he was examined by the doctor, he heard the solemn verdict: *You are going to die.*

Perhaps the doctor feared a negative response. If so, he need not have worried.

Billy replied without hesitation, *Glory be to God! I shall soon be in heaven.*

He then put the doctor on the spot: *When I get up there, shall I give them your compliments, and tell them you will be coming too?*

Billy Bray was ready and even rejoicing because he faced the fact of his illness and the ultimate comforting fact that Jesus Christ was his *Saviour*. If you need a real tonic, read the quaint old book by F. W. Bourne, *Billy Bray: The King's Son*.

Afraid—of that?

John and Betty Stam were devoted Christian missionaries in China when the Japanese forces invaded. Their lives were at risk. They feared for their baby girl and hid her, praying that someone sympathetic would find and care for her. (Their prayer was answered!)

They, too, faced the facts. Betty, aware of grave and imminent danger ahead, had already written,

*Afraid? Of what?
To feel the spirit's glad release?
To pass from pain to perfect peace,
The strife and strain of life to cease?
Afraid—of that?*



They were both beheaded. Through their faith in Jesus Christ they faced their martyrdom with peace and with dignity. They were ready. Jesus Christ had drawn the sting of death for them.

Read their inspirational life stories in *The Triumph of John and Betty Stam* by Mrs Howard Taylor.

But how about now?

How does coming to terms with terminal illness work out in the crucible heat of suffering? How about facing the shock of recent diagnosis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy or crucial operations? How can loved ones get through, as they suffer with and for the victims of serious illness?

Three friends of mine have recently been diagnosed with potentially terminal cancer. For Alistair, aged 70, the cancer has unexpectedly recurred five years after he thought he was cleared of it. Clive received a sudden shock diagnosis 'out of the blue' in later middle age. Rachel, aged 20, bravely restarted chemotherapy after five good years. As a young teenager she had been given four months to live. A fourth friend (aged just 11), David, has lost his brave seventeen-month battle with cancer during the writing of this booklet. Imagine how his family feels.

Alistair, Clive and Rachel do not know what the future holds. However, they all know God, who holds their future. Without minimizing their problems, difficulties, heartaches and emotional roller-coaster rides, knowing Christ as Saviour makes a huge difference to them all. Their bravery is an encouraging and shining example of how God's grace can help people who suffer.

