

**I READ PSALM 23 AND LET THE AGELESS
WORDS OF SCRIPTURE FORM A PRAYER.
MONTHS LATER, MY DAD WOULD ASK
THAT THAT VERY PRAYER BE GIVEN TO
EVERYONE WHO MOURNED HIS DEATH.**



In the Presence of God

The final and ultimate adventure

My dad died on January 6, 2008. I was at his side stroking his brow when he stopped breathing. My sister searched for a pulse. My mom, weeping, leaned over and kissed him and said, "It's over."

Yes, it was over—years of physical deterioration, years of uncertainty, years of pain, and years of longing. Doctors, researchers, friends and family members—we all did what we could to keep him here among us. He had medication, equipment, tireless care, and fervent prayers. My dad saw this and did his best to live—with purpose. That was his gift to us. Quietly, though, in his spirit, there was an unmistakable longing which we would glimpse from time to time as his disease progressed. About six months before his death, he wrote these words to me:

I find, in general terms, I am much more at peace with the concept of this life coming to an end. My personal prayers have changed. With the ever increasing disability, I now find myself praying a lot more for less time between now and death rather than a prolonged life. I also pray that as long as I am alive, my faith would remain strong and I would be able to live my remaining days in such a way as to honour God. It is sometimes difficult for me to be able to see any usefulness left in my life, but that, too, is in God's hands. I can still pray.

Shortly after that, I gave him a collection of writings and songs about heaven. He smiled with what seemed to be a mixture of gratitude and relief; it was as if he were saying, "Yes! Now you finally understand!"

He wanted all who knew him to understand his desire for heaven as well. Knowing he was dying, he stated explicitly that his funeral was to be an event for celebration and not for sadness. We often hear people say they are celebrating the life of someone who has died, but Dad wanted none of that. It was his entrance to eternity that he wanted us to call to mind. He referred to it as his "final and ultimate adventure."

Left: Rudolf Regehr during family outing in March 2004.

We feel his absence profoundly. We miss him. But absence is not in his vocabulary anymore. He experiences a sense of presence that we can only imagine, and if it is possible for one to have longings in heaven, his must be that we experience that presence too.

We are loved. We are cared for. We are not alone. That is the essential message of Scripture, and the heart of God's desire is that we learn to rest in His unending presence.

On a cool September day, I sat by the fireplace and thought about fear and death and trust. I thought about the Shepherd love of God and about my own inability to let myself be led. I read Psalm 23 and let the ageless words of Scripture form a prayer. Months later, my dad would ask that that very prayer be given to everyone who mourned his death.

It is a prayer for all of us who feel inadequate, fearful or alone. It is God's affirmation that if we tell Him we are His, we will know more surely that He is ours, and we will live more fully in His presence.

I remember keenly the experience of watching my dad die, and I sense a twofold longing. One is the inevitable human longing to undo the death of someone I have loved; but the second, more substantial, longing is the one my dad taught me—which for him has been satisfied, for he now lives in the presence of God.

Natasha Regehr is a teacher living in Peterborough, ON. This article is written in memory of Rudolf Regehr, who lived with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) for three years before his death on January 6, 2008.

A Prayer After Psalm 23

*Shepherd of mine, in You I lack nothing
the growing grass my cushion
the silent moving stream my guide
A NEW, COMPLETE SOUL is mine
Your choice for me is glowing with rightness
(glowing with the imprint of Your name)*

DEATH

is here

I see it feel it fear it HATE IT

DEATH

will not conquer my spirit

I face it with my hand held tightly
by the Master of dying and living

YOU OWN DEATH

it cannot overwhelm me when I am in Your care

EVIL?

YES, I FEAR IT.

But I will not succumb...

And I will fear it less each day I walk with You.

FOR THE OWNER OF DEATH

is the Comforter of the dying
and those who watch them go

WE ARE PROTECTED

WE ARE SAFE

in the crook of Your lovely, guiding staff.

We are herded into sanctuary, drawn into peace

COMFORT

How you comfort me, sweet God.

My enemies eat and drink and swagger

I FEAST and they are undone

How can the wronged one celebrate?

Because the good is always the victor.

Beaten down, I rise to toast my Saviour

"To Your exceeding greatness," I say, and all is calm

Evil falls silent

The victims fill the feast with singing

I am rich

I am chosen

I am gifted with the oil of Your favour

It drips from me, rolls down my back

SOAKS ME in Your unmeasured pleasure

GOODNESS MERCY LOVE

these follow me, dog my tracks relentlessly

I am pursued by Your unswerving love

And oh, You call me to Your unending presence

I will LIVE in this place of peace

there will be no leaving for me

I will enter move in settle.

I will never be without Your face again

Natasha Regehr

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