

The Final Gift



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The Gift We Rarely Name

There are many gifts in this life, and we spend much of our time giving and receiving them, often without pausing long enough to appreciate their depth. There are acts of benevolence and generosity, financial gifts that meet tangible needs, and gifts of the heart that meet the unseen ones. There are gifts of companionship, loyalty, and love, the quiet, enduring offerings that bind us together across time and circumstance.

Yet there is one final gift that we rarely speak about, perhaps because it unsettles us, perhaps because it confronts us with something we would rather keep at a distance. It is the gift of dying.

I have found myself thinking about this more often lately. At seventy-one, death no longer feels like a distant abstraction. It has a way of drawing closer, of speaking more clearly, of becoming, in a way I did not anticipate when I was younger, a kind of companion. Not a companion I would have chosen, and certainly not one I always

welcome, but a companion nonetheless, present in the background of thought, inviting reflection whether I seek it or not.

And as I have sat with this reality, I have come to recognize that we are not without choice in how we relate to it. We can resist it, deny it, and push it aside, convincing ourselves that it is not yet relevant. But denial has never had the power to make truth disappear. Or we can choose a different posture, one that acknowledges death as part of the natural movement of life, something not outside of us, but woven into the very fabric of our existence. In time, if we allow it, we may even come to a place where we do not merely tolerate its presence, but meet it with a measure of acceptance, perhaps even a quiet peace.

Craig's Courage

This reflection moved from abstraction to something deeply personal when I visited my brother-in-law, Craig, at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, WA, USA. Craig is nearing the end of his life. Whether measured in days or weeks, the horizon is close enough that it cannot be ignored, and he knows it.

Craig has lived a complicated life, and there is much contained in that simple statement. Like all of us, his story holds both beauty and brokenness, moments of strength and moments of failure, times when he rose to the occasion and times when he fell short. Yet what becomes striking in these final moments is not the complexity itself, but the clarity that begins to emerge from it.

What I saw in Craig was courage, not the kind that demands attention or seeks recognition, but a quieter, steadier form that reveals itself in how a man chooses to face the end of his own life. He is not preoccupied with fear, nor is he consumed with lament over what time remains. Instead, he offered a simple and profound reflection when we spoke. He said, "I had a good run."

There was something deeply moving in that statement, not because it denied the hardships of his life, but because it rose above them. After all the struggle, all the weight of his experiences, this is what he chose to hold onto. Not the pain, not the regret, but a sense of gratitude for the life he had been given.

Even more striking, however, was where his heart now rests. His focus is not on himself, but on those he loves. He speaks with clarity and tenderness about his sister, my wife Leah, expressing how deeply he loves her. He speaks with pride about his niece and nephew, wanting them to know how much they mean to him. In these final days, his greatest concern is not what he is losing, but what he is leaving behind in the hearts of those who have walked alongside him.

The Gift That Remains

And this is where the final gift begins to take shape.

Because when a man reaches the end of his life and chooses to stand in a place of courage, to speak love without hesitation, and to rest in a posture of gratitude rather than regret, he offers something profound to those who remain. He brings a kind of completion that does not require a perfect life, only an honest one. He reminds us that when the ledger is finally balanced, it is not the failures that define us, but the love we are willing to give and receive.

In that sense, Craig has given us a gift that will endure far beyond his remaining days. He has shown us that even in the face of death, there is still an opportunity to choose well, to orient the heart toward what truly matters, and to leave behind something of lasting value.

And so I find myself filled not only with sorrow, but with gratitude.

Thank you, Craig, for this gift. Thank you for the courage you have shown, for the peace you have embraced, and for the love you have made so clear. Thank you for reminding us that even at the end, there is still something meaningful to give.

This is a gift I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

And I find myself wondering what it would look like for each of us to live in such a way that when that moment comes, we are able to say something similar. Not perfectly, not without regret, but with a sense that we showed up, that we loved, that we did not turn away from what mattered most. Because in the end, it seems that life does not ask us to get everything right, but it does invite us to be present, to be honest, and to be willing to love even when it costs us something.

And perhaps even more than that, to leave in that same spirit. To love as we are going. To offer what remains of us with open hands, with compassion, with clarity, and with peace. Because in that final movement, in that quiet passage from this life to whatever comes next, the greatest gift we may have left to give is not what we accomplished, but how deeply and freely we are still willing to love.