

7 Steps for Joyful Living and Peaceful Dying



by Sharon Burch, MSN, RN, APRN, CNS

Compassionate Coach for People Who Are Living with a
Life-Threatening Illness and the People Who Love Them

Welcome to *7 Steps for Joyful Living and Peaceful Dying*

This booklet is designed to help you deepen your comfort, competence, and joy in living with a life-threatening illness or helping someone who is.

The 7 Steps reflect timeless approaches to life, death, health, and illness, backed by biological and psychological science and spiritual and shamanic arts.

Each step adds powerful strength, depth, and clarity to the process of joyful living and peaceful dying. Together their synergy is life changing.

The 7 Steps form the backbone of our *Caregiver's Compass* program, which is based on three principles:

- **Our spirit does not die:** It leaves the body and continues its journey.
- **By truly facing our death,** we receive vital gifts that empower us to joyfully live!
- **We are filled with love and light** when we support each other to live and leave in peace.

I welcome your comments, questions, suggestions, and personal stories. Simply email me at sharon@joyandhealing.org.

May your day be blessed with Peace and Joy,

Sharon Burch



Joyful Living Peaceful Dying

We've Forgotten that Illness and Death Are as Normal as Birth

People in modern Western cultures deal with illness and death very differently than people in the past century did. For example, in 1900 most people in the United States either lived on a farm or they knew someone who did. Animals were born, got sick or injured, and died with short life cycles that were easy to see. People generally lived a short life then, too.

Another big difference was that back in 1900, people were generally disabled only a short time before they died. And when they were sick, they usually didn't go to hospitals. Doctors, midwives, and neighbors came to the house and cared for the people in need.

The point is, in those days, lots of people died at home or work in plain view for all to see. People saw the natural life cycle of birth, infirmity, and death as part of daily life. If you look at the table below, you'll see some illustrations of this.

Changes in How We Deal with Death in the US

	In 1900	In 2010
Life Expectancy	47 Years	78 Years
The Most Common Place of Death	Home	Hospital or Nursing Home
Most Medical Expenses Paid by	Family	Insurance or Medicare
Disability Before Death	A Few Days or Weeks	2+ Years

Field, M.J., & Cassel, C.K. (Eds.). (2004). *Approaching Death: Improving Care at the End of Life*. Institute of Medicine, Committee on Care at the End of Life. Washington, DC: National Press. Data updated to 2010 by Sharon Burch.

The convergence of these changes, plus the advancement of a highly commercialized medical system and entertainment media cause us to expect to live into our 70s and beyond, and be outraged when we don't. These attitudes often manifest in combinations of false illusion, over-glorification, denial, and anger that distract us from opening to opportunities for the profound grief, gratitude, healing, and soul growth that only birth and death can provide.

Anger, Fear, and Sadness When We're Sick

How many people are in denial about their mortality? How many are angry when they or their loved ones become sick? In desperation to live, how many people sacrifice quality of life for the possibility of having more time?

When viewed as essential natural events on a soul's journey, birth and death have much in common. Birth is when our spirit enters a body, and death is when it leaves. As in any journey, the point is to keep on our path (not someone else's) and to not give up what's most important to us.

Small steps that are authentic are *much more* valuable than steps of any size that are not right for us. Unfortunately, part of our cultural immaturity is to look to authority figures for our answers instead of looking within.

A major complication of dying in Western cultures occurs when we allow ourselves to be dependent on a medical system in which dying is seen as the end, not the next step of our journey, and where life is measured in days and vital signs, leaving little room for real life.

Within that dependency, we look to physicians to pronounce our "prognosis," in other words, to forecast the probable course and outcome of disease and its chances of recovery. While physicians are highly trained specialists in treating health conditions with chemicals, radiation, and surgeries, most of them are not trained to assess and treat the whole person: body, mind, and soul. The very nature of their highly specialized training leaves little room for that.

In the job description we've written for physicians, we've asked them to **fight** against illness and injuries and not quit until they've run out of options. Consequently, most physicians aren't trained to work collaboratively with their patients in the sensitive process of weighing the pros and cons of treatment options. The best physicians empower their patients to make the choices that best honor their values and resources. When physicians do this, they've taken a personal interest in learning how to do it, and they give extra time that's not compensated in today's reimbursement system.

Doctors Are Often the Last Ones to Talk Clearly and Openly about Dying

"Except for hospice physicians, most doctors are usually the last one on the care team to admit that their patient is dying." Nurses know this, but I was surprised to hear it from a physician who had recently retired from a primary care practice and was now working in a hospital emergency room. We were discussing end-of-life care.

"First of all, doctors don't know how to admit defeat," he said, "and then they don't know how to express the obvious in simple words. By the time they can do it, there's usually not much time left."

When I asked this insightful and caring MD to tell me more, he described how he tells his

patients when he sees there's nothing more that can be done medically. *"I use different words and analogies for different situations and people,"* he said. *"I might start with 'We all know we will die, but we usually don't know how or when. We are all terminal.' Then I say 'Lets make a deal. Whoever gets there first needs to send the other a card and let them know if being good has been worth it. . . . What do you say about that?'"*

That was a caring physician's example of better communication to a patient than most physicians give. If your doctor was saying this to you, would you get the message that there was nothing more he could do to cure your illness?

If you did, where would it leave you in terms of knowing what to say or do next?

Can we stop looking at doctors as the pinnacle of authority and see them as **simply one part** of a holistic support system?

How can we be more self-aware, trusting our knowing and deeply nurturing our soul?

I encourage you to stay conscious of these valuable questions and use your illness to find your answers.

The following 7 Steps are contemporary reflections of timeless sustainable practices for joyful living and peaceful dying, found in various forms on every continent. The first six steps apply to the "healthy" family member or friend as much as they apply to the person who is living with a life-threatening illness.

7 Steps for Joyful Living and Peaceful Dying

Step 1: Be True to Yourself: Make Honest Self-Assessment and Self Care a Priority

- Look honestly at yourself and seek to know your blind spots.
- Respect your true feelings, needs, and boundaries.
- Use a wellness assessment and self-care plan to help you meet your needs.
- Reduce pain and anxiety with music, gentle touch, breathing practices, grounding, essential oils, and cleansing the chakras.
- Prepare for your inevitable physical death by identifying your end-of-life wishes.

Step 2: Release What No Longer Serves Your Wellbeing

- Step out of the drama triangle and exercise your right to be the artist of your life.
- Embrace self-permission to live and to die in ways that are right for you.
- Release your need to blame or shame yourself and others.
- Face your fear, anger, and sadness: Clear emotional toxicity and limiting beliefs.
- Know that joy is available in every moment.

Step 3: Talk about the Quality of Your Life and Death with Family, Friends, and Healers

- Talk about it in your daily life, and talk about it during serious illnesses or accidents.
- Communicate your end-of-life wishes verbally and in writing.
- Review your life (silently or aloud) to digest your experiences and keep the pearls.

Step 4: Ask for and Receive Love and Support

- Draw from your spiritual tradition and from others that honor life as Sacred.
- Connect with Divine Love to nourish the love and life inside you.
- Explore and practice your faith, asking humans, nature, and the Divine to support you and your healers.

Step 5: Make Peace with What Is

- Accept and honor yourself as you are.
- Grieve what you're losing; Nourish what you'll keep.
- Forgive yourself and others.

Step 6: Prepare to Leave Your Body When the Time Comes

- Practice and visualize your transition of consciousness.
- Open your "nearing-death awareness."

Step 7: For Family, Friends, and Health Professionals: How to Give Real Support

- *Listen*: honor the person's values and support their life review.
- Be a healing presence by cultivating openness, trust, self-care, and compassion.
- Help reduce pain, anxiety, and fatigue by relaxing the stress response naturally.
- Learn how the natural healing and dying processes affect appetite, thirst, breathing, and the heart, brain, energy, and consciousness.
- Care for the body after death, in making meaningful ceremony and in the burial.
- Explore after-death communication, if that calls to you.

A Personal Invitation for You



Hi, my name is Sharon Burch.

I'm a holistic health educator, advocate, coach, and advanced practice registered nurse who has worked with professional and family caregivers in hospitals, nursing homes, home care, hospice, and the community-at-large since 1974.

I developed the *Caregiver's Compass* coaching program to help business owners care for an ill or dying loved one at home while navigating their high-stakes challenges at work.

I value being practical and down-to-earth while being mindful and honoring of my clients' complex feelings, relationships, and needs.

If someone you care about has a life-threatening illness, our *Caregiver's Compass* coaching program can help.

The *Caregiver's Compass* personal coaching program can help you:

- Navigate dysfunctional family dynamics
- Communicate clearly with healthcare staff
- Find value and meaning in the time you have
- Honor your own needs while caring for others
- Manage your pain, fear, sadness, and responsibilities
- Cultivate feelings of acceptance and empathy
- Be as prepared as possible when it's time to let go
- Align your actions with what truly matters to you
- Know your self-care options and how to make the most of them
- Relate to both the mystery and the practical aspects of living and dying
- Talk with your family, friends, and doctors to make the ill person's wishes clear
- Make the best of what might be one of the most challenging times of your life
- Create healing experiences with your family that are as joyful as possible
- Honor the feelings that naturally arise when you engage with illness and death
- Create environments that support peace within yourself and with your loved ones
- Take advantage of the profound learning opportunities this time is presenting you

Each *Caregiver's Compass* client receives:

- Personal coaching by phone to receive practical, emotional, and spiritual support and guidance
- Unlimited access to ask questions by email
- Short audio and video recordings, checklists, and mobile apps to help you with your specific challenges
- Certified pure essential oil blends to help you move through the hardest emotions as gracefully as possible
- Referrals to additional resources, if needed, to support your unique situation

To see if the *Caregiver's Compass* coaching program might be right for you, I invite you to have a complimentary 30-minute consultation with me by phone. On this call you can share your most urgent concerns and receive my guidance about your next steps.

Click here to set up your consultation: <http://goo.gl/forms/oB5guNnEzOqCdTEQ2>

It's been my pleasure to share these 7 Steps with you.

May they inspire you and bring you more joy and healing.

~ *Sharon Burch*