

Compassionate Care Ministry  
*Church Training Guide*

*Anticipating*  
H E A V E N

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Adapted from *Anticipating Heaven* by Dr. Pamela Pyle, copyright 2024

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# Introduction

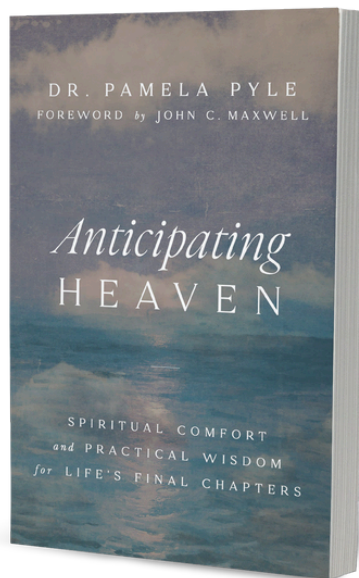
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Welcome to the Anticipating Heaven pastoral resource guide.

This guide is your companion in navigating often challenging conversations around aging, serious diagnoses, and end-of-life matters. Designed especially for pastors and church staff, it offers an array of training and reference materials, empowering you to provide thoughtful and compassionate care in your ministry.

This isn't just about providing answers—it's about equipping you with the wisdom and empathy needed to address both the spiritual and practical questions your congregants may face. We know these conversations can be tough, but with this guide in hand, you'll feel more confident and prepared to offer meaningful support to those on this path, as well as their families and caregivers.

Discover how you can make an important difference in the lives of those you serve and equip your staff to minister with grace during this crucial time.



Learn more about the book and find more free resources, including additional study curriculum for individuals or small groups by request, at [drpamela.com/anticipatingheaven](http://drpamela.com/anticipatingheaven)

## *A Note from the Author*

It is my humble honor to present to you these resources for your ministry of proclamation and compassionate acts to share the Gospel of Christ. My name is Dr. Pamela Prince Pyle, and I am a Board Certified Internal Medicine Physician. I have practiced medicine for over three decades in U.S. hospitals and since 2009 in nascent communities in Rwanda.

I have been a physician for those facing a serious diagnosis for the first time, and those on their dying journey unto death. Chaos and fear accompany many, even the most faithful Christ followers. This may create cognitive dissonance for the Christian whose belief system may be challenged as they come face to face with their own mortality. I have personally witnessed the internal conflict associated with these divergent beliefs and these are reported through studies in the fields of medicine, bioethics, psychology, thanatology, and religious studies.

Dying and death is less often a relational and faith-filled experience and more often an isolated and clinical one. Patients and especially families are forced into medical decision-making in a crisis and clinicians ill-prepared to have faith sensitive conversations are of little help. I know this because I was one.

I did not come to faith until my thirties and years into my medical career. My faith and the power of the Holy Spirit produced a deeper understanding and empathy for all patients, regardless of their faith or lack thereof.

There are so many nuanced conversations that could be had, should be had, along the patient's journey from initial diagnosis until death, even if that death comes by the slow unwinding of the miracle associated with aging.

Billy Graham's powerful message of the Gospel was often punctuated with exclamation points in the form of a question and a statement. "Are you prepared to die?"<sup>[i]</sup> "If you're not sure that you're ready to meet God, if you're not sure what your day or hour might be, make sure tonight."<sup>[ii]</sup>

This is the ultimate death awareness we must consider. In the journey through *Anticipating Heaven* and these resources the Gospel is presented including the opportunities which exist even at the end-of-life. I have discovered as a Christian physician the extraordinary privilege to share hope through the Gospel which exists amid suffering. We are all more attentive in our pain.

With compassionate care and in the power and discernment of the Holy Spirit, Christ saves. Self-reflection on the question posed by Billy Graham will clarify the importance of soul confidence in the finished work of Christ and the hope we can experience Anticipating Heaven.

For His Glory,  
*Dr. Pamela Pyle*



[i] Billy Graham, Glasgow Crusade, 1955  
[ii] Billy Graham, Anaheim Crusade, 1985

# *Compassionate Care Ministry:* Equipping Pastors and Church Staff for End-of-Life Care

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## **How to Use This Guide:**

This training is designed to be used as a 3-part series of 1-hour sessions. You may choose to break the series up over several weeks, do it all in one day, or make it a self-study to be completed at one's own pace.

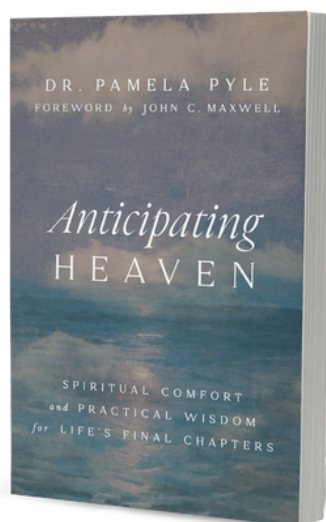
## **Objectives:**

- Equip pastors and their staff with skills to provide spiritual and emotional support to those facing end-of-life transitions.
- Enhance understanding of practical end-of-life matters and effective communication and care strategies.

These handouts serve as both a guide during the training session and a resource for ongoing reference, helping you apply learned skills in your ministry. By the end of this training, you will be better equipped to provide nuanced, compassionate care to individuals and families navigating the journey of aging and serious illness.

We recommend using this guide alongside the book *Anticipating Heaven: Spiritual Comfort and Practical Wisdom for Life's Final Chapters* by Dr. Pamela Pyle, a resource that will equip you and your congregation to anticipate heaven with clarity, peace, and hope. It delivers timeless principles that can be applied to any healthcare system or denomination. You can learn more about the book and purchase at a discount at [ChurchSource.com](https://ChurchSource.com).

Learn more about the book at  
[drpamela.com/anticipatingheaven](https://drpamela.com/anticipatingheaven)



# Session 1

## Understanding End-of-Life Ministry

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### 1. Welcome and Introduction (15 minutes)

- Brief overview of the training and its objectives.
- Icebreaker activity to build rapport among participants and identify needs of the congregation and staff.

### 2. Understanding End-of-Life Ministry (30 minutes)

- Discuss the role of pastors in end-of-life care (see page 5 for The Pastoral Role in Compassionate Care Ministry).
- Explore challenges and opportunities in ministering to the aging, seriously ill, their loved ones, and their caregivers.

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- **Summary:** The pastoral role in ministering through end-of-life care
  - **Key Points:**
    - Prepare congregants to face challenging circumstances and questions around death and dying.
    - Create space for conversations and preparing to replace fear and chaos with confidence and peace.
  - **Discussion Questions:**
    - What would an ideal call and prayer tree do for those in your care? How can you start to build one?
  - **Practical Tips:**
    - Lean on your fellow leaders to share the weight and responsibilities of this ministry
    - Identify key goals of your ministry

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### 3. Spiritual Guidance (15 minutes)

- **Key Topics:** Offering comfort and hope, scriptural teachings.
- **Activity:** Short group discussion on needs for those in your care.
- **Resources Needed:** Call tree handout (see page 6).

## *The Pastoral Role in Compassionate Care Ministry*

Compassionate care, from diagnosis to the end-of-life, requires multidisciplinary care. We witness more of this in the secular world. Palliative care providers and their governing bodies are recognizing the role of spirituality in whole person care. But despite the advent of multiple studies with development of clinical guidelines to identify existential distress and spiritual health by palliative care clinicians, the access to providers is limited in the care continuum.

If trained providers are available for the patient facing a serious diagnosis to the one facing death, the concept of spiritual care would most likely be described as religious pluralism. Absolute truth does not exist. There is a void in Christ-centered care in these specialties for the believer in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the believer in everything and nothing. This offers opportunities for Pastors, Chaplains, and lay leaders to lean into these difficult topics.

Preparing congregants for the inevitable diagnosis or the tragic call results in death awareness. Thoughtful discussions will minister to the needs of those already afflicted and equip those who care for them who will one day face their own mortality.

Death awareness is the foundation for the practical planning needed to diminish the chaos and fear which may already exist or that which arrives with the unexpected. Those called within church leadership for compassionate care ministry will discover the power of reaching people with the practical and the spiritual. A train the trainer model of empowering others will create consistent scalability.

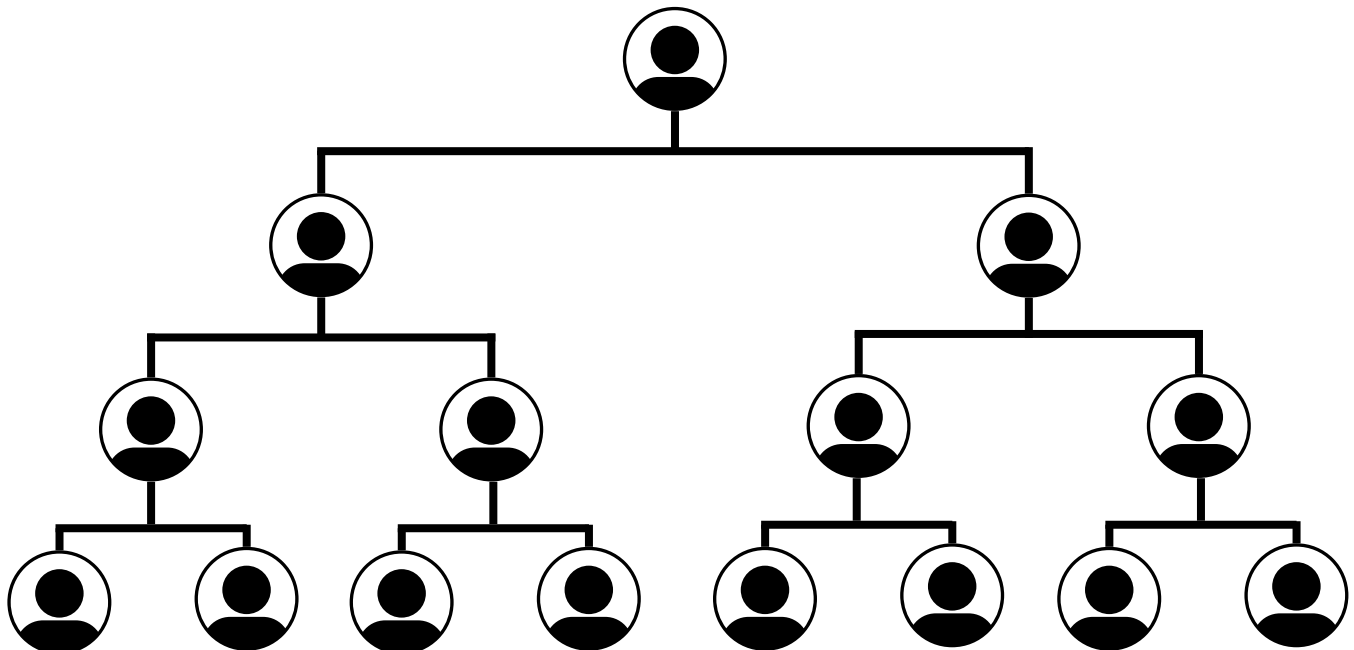
## Build a Call Tree

This prepares you for the expected and unexpected. It is especially crucial if you or your loved one has a serious or terminal diagnosis. A call and prayer tree are created in the same manner and may be one and the same depending on your circumstance.

You will need help from those closest to you to complete a call tree. If you or your family need to activate the call tree, only one call will need to be made rather than many to relay information, prayer requests, and visiting schedules. More detail on building a call tree and the power of prayer is available in *Anticipating Heaven*, Chapter 10: The Power of Prayer in God's Sovereign Care.

### **Build Your Call Tree:**

- Considering a crisis, designate one person whom you trust to be the person you or your loved one calls. Designate another person as a backup in the event your primary person is unreachable.
- That person will notify the next two people in your tree, and they will each notify the next two people and so forth. The concept is to identify the fastest way to relay information and to have people praying in an emergency.
- This system also works to notify those with predetermined roles that they have been activated. For example, one person may notify family, another person may notify schools or employers, and someone else may take care of pets. All of this is initiated with just one call from someone who is with the patient.
- This same method of relaying information helps the patient or the loved one to focus on what is happening in the clinical setting rather than on making multiple calls.





# Session 2

## Emotional Support Techniques

### 1. Emotional Support Techniques (45 minutes)

- Key Topics: Active listening, compassionate presence, and managing grief.
  - Activity: Role-playing scenarios to practice empathetic listening and emotional support.
  - Resources Needed: “Ministering Comfort at End of Life” handout (see page 8), internal conflicts at end-of-life handout (see page 9), role-play scripts.
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- **Summary:** Approaches to providing empathetic care and managing grief.
  - **Key Points:**
    - Active listening as a cornerstone of emotional support.
    - Understanding the stages of grief and how to navigate them.
  - **Discussion Questions:**
    - What strategies can be employed to foster a compassionate presence?
    - How can we support caregivers and families effectively?
  - **Practical Tips:**
    - Practice active listening during conversations.
    - Use role-play exercises to enhance communication skills.
    - Offer regular check-ins with families and caregivers.
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### 2. Practical Application and Discussion (15 minutes)

- Open the floor for sharing experiences and insights from the role-playing activity.
- Discussion on strategies for continual improvement in providing emotional support.

## Ministering Comfort at End of Life

The following statements are written from the patient's perspective and are meant to be a glimpse of how love is given and received at the end of life. It is helpful to describe what comfort they need and how those needs may be met. For practical guidance in walking through comforting those at end-of-life and their loved ones, see *Anticipating Heaven* chapter 9: The Final Paradigm Shift: "Wow, This Is It!"

- "Family and friends, I do not want to be a burden. As my body weakens, I don't know how not to be. I pray you understand."
- "Loved ones, I cannot face the reality of death all day every day. If I need to talk about normal things, make a joke, or tell a story about the crazy neighbor next door, please know this is a valuable if short distraction from my preparations for death."
- "Friends and loved ones, sometimes I may feel like talking and sometimes I may need you to just sit with me. For the record, I do appreciate you coming and showing you care."
- "Loved ones, allow me to express my sorrow. I am preparing for my losses. Listen to me, hold my hand, be still. And it is okay if you cry with me."
- "Everyone, I have failures, regrets, and hurts I still carry. If I bring up such things, will you listen to my concerns? I don't need a solution from you. I'm merely hoping to lay these things down, forgive, and find forgiveness before I rest. Let me know that my life had meaning, value, and purpose, even in (or especially in) my final hours."
- "Those closest to me, let me know that in your grief, you will one day be okay. I know you might not feel okay for a long time, but you will take care of yourself. I know you will miss me, yet one day you will be okay, and then perhaps someday, you'll even feel okay. This will give me peace."
- "Those who share my faith, whatever my guilt or shame, help me remember grace through Jesus Christ. I must fully understand the cost Jesus paid on the cross for my guilt and shame. To carry these emotions to my ending would diminish the price that was paid for me."
- "I may be restless from my thoughts of lacking closure." I may need to hear the voice of a loved one or the words, 'I forgive you.' Consider these if I struggle near the end."
- "Perhaps this dread which makes me restless is my rejection of grace. You may mourn my lack of faith. I now mourn it too. My soul is anguished as time draws near. Pray that the truth I rejected may be revealed even in my final hour."
- "Those who share my faith, perhaps my faith has been a guiding star on my horizon. Sometimes it seemed so clear, so close, I could physically touch it. Sometimes it was obscured by cloudy nights and frightening storms. Now as death approaches, its warm light envelops my soul. I don't need to hold it in my arms to know that its presence has not changed. I know my perspective has changed. Remember this: clouds and storms will come and go, but the guiding star remains the same."
- "Loved ones, when I am ready to depart this life, please let me go. Please do not make me feel guilty for leaving. I must detach in my final hours to prepare for my final breath. This process will be gradual, and I may no longer speak. Do not be alarmed; this is normal."
- "Loved ones, when my eyes are closed and I no longer wake and interact, I can still sense your presence. Thank you for being here. I can still hear, and as I am anticipating heaven, would you help me worship my way home? Read Scripture, play worship music, and pray with me. I am looking toward the Savior, and he is calling me home."

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# Common Internal Conflicts at End of Life

by Dr. Pamela Pyle



## *Faith in Divine Healing vs. Faith in God's Will*

As Christians, we believe in divine healing. For terminally ill patients and families, this belief may come into tension with the medical prognosis that death is imminent. This may result in “waiting” for a miracle while enduring treatments as proof of faith.

Patients may choose continuing therapies that have minimal risk of benefit and high risk of side effects contributing to poor quality of life at the end-of-life. Families may wish to continue life support beyond what the patient may have chosen with the belief that God will provide a miraculous healing if given enough time.

Having witnessed miraculous healings, including my son born blind and regaining sight, God works mysteriously and rarely through medical intervention. One patient received healing after all life support stopped and death was imminent. He woke up and we knew we had witnessed a miracle.



## *Belief in Eternal Life vs. Fear of Death*

Scripture teaches us that death in Christ is not the end but a transition to eternal life in heaven. However, even devout Christians may experience a natural fear of death or the unknown, causing cognitive dissonance between their religious belief in a peaceful afterlife and their emotional fear of death.

Thoughtful discussion around this topic reveals Christian patients are more likely afraid of the dying process than death itself. Fear of the unknown results in generalized anxiety. Preparing patients by addressing their specific concerns is valuable but these conversations don't always occur in a clinical setting.

In my experience, the faith that leads to peace which surpasses all understanding is expressed more intensely the closer one approaches their final breath. This peace can be discovered earlier when fears are defined and addressed. This leads to the opportunity to worship in our journey home. This simple truth is one of the most powerful methods of evangelism for the observer and encouragement for the loved ones left behind.



## *The Sanctity of Life vs. The Acceptance of Death*

Christians believe in the sanctity of life. We understand it as a precious gift of God who created us in his image. Our eternal life was purchased through the passion and death of Christ on the cross. Yet, our very understanding of the value of life may confuse decision making when it comes to dying and death.

The desire to uphold life at all cost may conflict with the recognition that some interventions are merely resulting in increased suffering, rather than protecting life. The 1960's began the movement for the medicalization of dying and death. What was once primarily a family-centered event, with occasional medical involvement, has transformed into a predominantly medical occurrence, often with less family presence.

# Session 3

## Practical End-of-Life Matters and Effective Communication

### 1. Practical End-of-Life Matters (45 minutes)

- Key Topics: Memorial planning, hospice care, and ethical considerations.
  - Activity: Breakout groups to brainstorm and present solutions to common logistical challenges.
  - Resources Needed: Checklist templates, hospice care brochures.
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- **Summary:** Navigating logistics like memorial services and hospice care.
  - **Key Points:**
    - Planning and conducting memorial services.
    - Understanding hospice care and ethical considerations. (This may include difficult conversations around brain death, persistent vegetative states, honoring the advanced care directives of the loved one, etc. *Anticipating Heaven* can help you understand these end-of-life needs to support the family through decision-making processes).
  - **Discussion Questions:**
    - What are the key components of a meaningful memorial service?
    - How can we guide families through hospice decisions?
  - **Practical Tips:**
    - Provide a checklist for end-of-life planning. (See the Planning for Peace checklist on the following page)
    - Collaborate with local hospice services for resources and support.
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### 2. Wrap-Up and Reflection (15 minutes)

- Open the floor for questions and sharing personal insights. Encourage participants to set goals for implementing session learnings.
- Share additional resources and reading materials for continued learning.
- By the end of this training session, you will be better equipped to provide nuanced, compassionate care to individuals and families navigating the journey of aging and serious illness.

## Planning for Peace Checklist

The following checklist breaks down end-of-life planning into categories, providing handy to-dos. It also includes additional planning that leads to peace for the patient. Family members and loved ones may review this list and consider engaging in the areas in which the patient may need help. It is not meant to overwhelm you, but it is a comprehensive resource you can keep returning to as you implement one item after another. Regardless of age or health status, beginning this plan early prepares us for the expected and unexpected.

Don't worry if some of the terms seem unfamiliar. A Discussion Guide with expanded explanations is available in *Anticipating Heaven* (Resource E: Planning for Peace Checklist).

### Healthcare

- Medical Records Digital Access Instructions
- Medical Care Contacts List
- Medical Records
- Summary File
- Advance Care Plan (see *Anticipating Heaven* chapters 5-7)
- POLST form (physician orders for life-sustaining treatment)
- Palliative Care Preferences
- Hospice Care Plan

### Relationships

- Restoration Plan
- Call Tree
- Care Plan (for spouse or other relationships if you have been the primary caregiver, parent, or guardian)
- Caregiver Team
- Pet Care

### Practical Matters

- Ethical Will
- Last Will and Testament
- Legacy Plan
- Giving Plan
- Estate Plan
- Donation Strategy
- Asset List
- Bank Accounts
- Debts

## Planning for Peace Checklist

### Contacts

- Personal
- Professional—Attorney(s)
- Financial Adviser, Accountant
- Executor of Will

### Documents

- Insurance Policies
- Titles and Registrations
- Social Security Card
- Employment History and Dates
- Military History
- Contracts
- Loan Documents, including those Paid in Full
- Medicare/Medicaid/Other Health Insurance Cards
- Policies or Prepaid Plans Covering Funeral Expenses
- Driver's License
- Passport
- Birth, Death, Wedding Certificates
- Name Change Documents
- Divorce Settlement Documents
- Family History
- All Other Documents Included in the Other Categories of this Checklist

## Planning for Peace Checklist

### Accounts and Passwords

- Email
- Computer
- Cell Phone/ Tablet/ Other Devices
- Subscriptions
- Credit Cards
- Airline and Hotel Reward Accounts
- Store Accounts
- Medical Accounts
- Financial Accounts
- Insurance Accounts
- Music/Video/Internet/Television/Cable/Phone Accounts
- Professional Accounts
- Donation Accounts
- Automatic Food Delivery/Amazon/Grocery Delivery  
(instructions for cancellation of automatic deliveries)
- Social Media Accounts
- Recurring Payment Accounts

### End of Life Plan

- Funeral Plans
- My Last Six Months
- Living Wake

# *8 Ways to Support Those in Need*

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Equip your congregation with practical and heartfelt ways to support their brothers and sisters facing serious illness or grieving the loss of a loved one. This guide is perfect for well-intentioned members who are eager to serve but often find themselves uncertain about how to offer the most meaningful assistance. By providing clear, compassionate suggestions, this guide will help your congregation act with purpose as they seek to serve those in need.

## **1. Organize a prayer group**

Gather a group together to regularly pray for the individual and their family.

## **2. Offer to run errands**

Help ease daily burdens by offering to run errands such as grocery shopping, picking up prescriptions, or handling small tasks around the home.

## **3. Be a listening ear**

Sometimes, the best support is simply being present. Make yourself available to listen without offering unsolicited advice, allowing them to express their feelings and thoughts openly.

## **4. Provide transportation**

Offer to drive to medical appointments, support groups, or church services, ensuring they have one less thing to worry about.

## **5. Coordinate a cleaning crew**

Organize a group of volunteers to help with cleaning their home or doing yard work.

## **6. Send a personalized care package**

Put together thoughtful care packages with items that could provide comfort, such as a soft blanket, a journal, or favorite snacks.

## **7. Offer childcare assistance**

Offer to babysit or help with school pick-ups and drop-offs.

## **8. Join a meal train**

Coordinate meal deliveries to ensure the family has nourishing food without the stress of preparation during challenging times.