



The Art of Dying: Living Fully Into the Life to Come

Rob Moll

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How now shall we die? Death will come to us all, but most of us live our lives as if death does not exist. People are living longer than ever, and medicine has made dying more complicated, more drawn out and more removed from the experience of most people. Death is partitioned off to hospital rooms, separated from our daily lives. Most of us find ourselves at a loss when death approaches. We don't know how to die well. Rob Moll recovers the deeply Christian practice of dying well. For centuries Christians have prepared for the "good death" with particular rituals and spiritual disciplines that have directed the actions of both the living and the dying. In this well-researched and pastorally sensitive book, Moll provides insight into death and dying issues with in-person reporting and interviews with hospice workers, doctors, nurses, bioethicists, family members and spiritual caregivers. He weighs in on bioethical and medical issues and gives guidance for those who care for the dying as well as for those who grieve. This book is a gentle companion for all who face death, whether one's own or that of a loved one. Christians can have confidence that because death is not the end, preparing to die helps us truly live.

The Art of Dying: Living Fully Into the Life to Come Details

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Sheri-lee says

I'm saying this is a 5 because I feel like it is a book that everyone needs to read...or at least one similar to it. It's a bit drawn out at points but still it is something we all need to recognize. Having worked in geriatrics, I feel all these things much more acutely and have thought these very thoughts. I love the people I work with who are considered elderly. They are so interesting and funny and grumpy and forgetful and lovely and curmungeonly that I can't help but love them. People are people no matter what their age--and they need to be treated as people. (Although this is not the scope of this book, it fits the same with kids...they are people too).

I also like the end of life discussion. I'm glad that Steve and I have discussed what we would/would not pursue in the face of terminal illness and what we want included in our funerals. :) Not morbidly, just thoughtfully.

Tom says

Rob Moll has written a book that is a must have for pastors. I write that for several reason. On, death and dying are really not well taught in seminary. Two, pastors have to be able to deal well with the issues of aging and dying; after all unless Jesus returns, we will all face death, whether in our family, our congregation or in our selves. Three, the culture uses all sorts to 'cosmetic' actions and words to mask the reality of death - something the church did not do until the 20th century.

Moll seeks to inculcate a "Culture of Resurrection." "A culture of resurrection takes the lessons of dying well and the hope of new life in Christ and applies them throughout the life of a Christian and in the body of the church." Dying well is the key; dying full of grace. "If we cannot learn to die well (to live our final days reconciled with those we leave behind and anticipating our future life with God), we cannot learn to live well."

As J. I. Packer states in his cover note this book restores the 'good death' as the ideal for the Christian.

Nate Walker says

This book was given to me when my Dad was sick but I ended up reading it after he passed. It was a great conversation partner to help me reflect on what I had experienced. Thankful for his care and wisdom.

Zack says

This book is incredibly valuable, and unique. I greatly appreciate Rob's exhortation for the church to have greater initiative in the lives of elderly and dying members. A valuable expansion or follow-up to the book

would be a separate work or additional chapter(s) on sudden death, and how that is different than the more typical "gradual" death.

Philip says

Chances are you haven't read to many books about dying. Moll's important and accessible book is a good place to begin:

"Death is indeed evil. Yet death is also a mercy; it is the final affliction of life's miseries. It is the entrance to life with God. Life's passing can be a beautiful gift of God. This riddle of death's evil and its blessing is not difficult to solve. We enact it every Good Friday as well call the evil of Christ's death to be followed on Easter Sunday with the joy of his resurrection. We do not rejoice in Christ's death or Judas' betrayal. Yet there is no evil so great that God cannot bring joy and goodness from it. That is why death deserves our attention in life. Because we instinctively want to avoid it, to turn our face away, it is good to look death in the eye and constantly remind ourselves that our hope is in God, who defeated death."

I was very interested in his discussion of how modern medicine can subject people to aggressive treatment at the end of their lives, treatment that that doesn't necessarily improve their living or their dying. This is a discussion we really need to have but Moll's treatment is one-sided in emphasizing the problem of overtreatment. He mentions and then dismisses the concern that people with disabilities are discriminated against by being denied routine life-sustaining treatment. Moll's contention that most doctors err on the the side of overtreatment does nothing to address the very real problem that treatments are sometimes being granted or refused based on utilitarian or ableist grounds. His book sorely needs to listen to why the worry of so many people with disabilities is that they'll be given a Do Not Resuscitate order against their will, not that they'll be kept alive against their will.

Melody says

I picked up Rob Moll's first book at a time when a family member was dying ... too young. The book became a valuable way for me to think through my own responses to his death, and gently prompted me to begin thinking about how I will live well in order to die well.

This is not necessarily a book for those who are mourning, or those who are themselves dying. It is a book for those of us who are able-bodied and of sound mind - and who, because of that, would like to avoid thinking about our own death. But he challenges us to think about how we value the elderly and the dying, how we can engage them more fully in our lives. This is a book about living in the tension that is Christian death - truly the result of sin, in need of mourning, but also a harbinger of the life yet to come, and therefore a reason to rejoice. Moll pushes readers to think about how to love those who grieve, and how to undertake conversations about end of life issues with courage and sensitivity.

Journalistic in its tone and style, Moll moves easily through a range of topics related to death and dying. He is careful and thoughtful, but never shies away from difficult topics; he is starkly honest about his own struggles with death and dying.

The Art of Dying is engaging, direct, and easy to understand, but it can be a challenging read, simply because the subject matter is challenging to think about on a sustained basis. I recommend it as a way of expanding

our thinking about living (and therefore dying) well, and as a way of opening up those all important conversations with family and friends, about how we hope to live out the end of our lives.

Deborah says

Reviewed by Herb:

In our society today, death is the taboo word for most. And the real tragedy is not only do many try to hang on to life at any cost, but we also then forgot how to face death well. Moll's book is a welcome and gentle companion for all who face death personally or in the life of a loved one. Reading it in the light of Debbie's father's approaching death was an important component to helping me process what was going on in my own life. Christians can have confidence that death is not the end but a natural step into the best to come. Read this if you want to think through your approach to death for yourself or another.

Daralyn Hollenbeck says

I feel that this book expounds and refocuses us on chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians. Verses 16-18 "do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

This book encourages us not to get stuck. To get past denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and regret, all the way to the acceptance of Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 "1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot" is God's plan.

Nowhere in the book is hastening death or denying life persuaded. This book is for those who have reached a stage somewhere between bargaining, sadness & regret, and the acceptance steps of grief. If you are mired down in denial and anger, this book will be hard to understand. Yea, impossible.

Robin says

Given that there are few (or no) other books on the topic of "dying well", which is a concept that I find fascinating, I had somewhat high hopes for this book. Unfortunately, I found it to be completely, utterly, horribly, 100% terrible. It was perhaps the longest 150-page book I've ever read. It was poorly written, repetitive, and short on insight.

Gretchen says

Helpful exploration of cultural challenges of approaching death in today's culture. Opened my eyes to challenges for Christians face today. For those who are dealing with death from a distance and not up close themselves.

Chola Mukanga says

Death may not be an exciting topic but it is certainly an important, if often overlooked subject. Which is why Rob Moll's recent book *The Art of Dying* is a welcome publication. The book has been written to address the question of the good way to die. Moll believes our culture does not know how to approach death because we have become so removed from experiencing it. This is a problem because we can't live well unless we are intimate with death and know how to die well. The Christian approach, Moll argues, is that death is both evil and mercy wrapped in one. Therefore there are significant benefits from knowing how to die well.

At the surface we should all be capable of dying well because people take longer to die than before which should offer plenty of preparation. The reality is exactly the opposite. For many Christians the allure of modern medicine has meant greater focus on self preservation and surviving at all costs than preparing well for death. Dying as a spiritual discipline has long been forgotten.

This is in stark contrast to Christians in past centuries who practised the art of dying (*ars moriendi*). They had come to recognise that death not only marks entry into God's presence, it is also tremendous opportunity to witness to those around us and heal the wounds of the community. Through dying well the old saints prepared the spirit for the next life whilst impacting the present.

So what then is dying well? According to Moll a good death is a Christian death. That is to say a death or funeral that seeks to reenact or re-express the gospel. This means for the mourning community revering the body, celebrating the life, re-knitting the community and offering hope to the world. Dying well begins prior to death. This requires developing a culture of resurrection. A culture where the elderly and the dying continue their presence in the church. For the aged finding ways for them to serve is important. For the dying, it is about the rest of the congregation seeing life lived and ended with hope and faithfulness.

At the heart of dying well is a strong belief that though death is ugly, in the hands of God it is an art that he uses to sharpen us for himself. Many of us make every effort to avoid death or contemplate our own mortality. In the process we miss out on the benefits of living in light of death. Contemplating death rearranges our priorities and allows us to live lives that places God at the centre. We can avoid running away from death by building strong family relations, introducing the young to the old, and building strong support schemes. Those are the things that makes for dying well.

The book certainly makes compelling and thought provoking reading. Moll's observations of society's paradoxical attitudes to death are fascinating. He rightly notes that whilst western society is fighting hard to expand the so-called right doctors and hospitals are astounding in their ability and passionate desire to rescue cancer sufferers, accident victims or heart-attack patients.

Christians too are guilty of the same self contradiction. We believe in the victory over the grave, but then totally avoids talking about it. We fear death and are afraid to talk about it because death is an evil, the horrible rending of a person from her body, from loved ones, from the ability to be fully in God's image. And yet, as Moll rightly observes, "Death is indeed evil. Yet death is also a mercy; it is the final affliction of life's miseries. It is the entrance to life with God. Life's passing can be a beautiful gift of God".

Unfortunately, these lucid observations about the nature of death never really get a biblical treatment of death. Neither is it explained how death can be a defeated enemy and yet still remains a tool in God's hand.

Readers are left to fill in the blanks depending on the level of their biblical knowledge. Other gaps emerge elsewhere. Prominently, Moll seems to give a silent nod to cremation but without ever really explaining how such a practice, with no biblical record, is best defended. Just how do we reconcile the Christian view of the body with cremation? Especially in view of the strong emphasis Moll gives to the sacredness of the body, replete with classic quotes such as “it is to save the body that Jesus came”.

Perhaps the main weaknesses of Moll's *Art of Dying* lie in what the book doesn't say. Moll largely presents death as an outcome of ageing. This is helpful for many people but it turns the book to be largely about ageing rather than death per se. The reason perhaps is related to a related weakness. This is an American book written without any global reference.

The examples and all the applications do not seem to recognise a world in the Global South or East where the large majority of Christians live. Indeed for many Christians in the Global South much of what is contained there probably already takes. Funerals certainly are not parties. They are serious business and opportunities for healing and restoring communities.

But even within the western audience there's confusion on who is meant to read it. The byline suggests it is for those contemplating their mortality. The detail suggests this is for church leaders. There are exhortations for dying to be regarded as a spiritual discipline by the average Christian, but its by no means reads as a book meant to deepen spirituality practically.

None of that means that the book should be thrown in the bin. It is worth a read particularly for Christian leaders of western congregations where ageing is a problem. Its reflections on how the young can learn from the old are certainly worth reading. But perhaps its key contribution is it is an opening shot for others to write a more global and more encompassing work.

Greg Lee says

Technology has given everyone hope. There is hope around the corner for the next best drug or technology that will prolong our life. However, we as the author states has lost "the art of dying." We have made death a taboo subject that cannot be discussed or debated for fear that it might offend instead of lift up. The author bring to the fore many ideas worth talking about with the living and the dying.

Kerri Burr says

Some good ideas and thoughts...others that didn't resonate with me. Good read if you work with people facing death.

Seth Pierce says

In this book the author chronicles society's, particularly the Christian community's, relationship with death and the dying. He makes the point that we have largely contracted out dealing with the dying to hospitals and funerals homes. We don't want to acknowledge death, deal with it, or help others through it and as a result we do not die well or grieve in a healthy way.

The book is full of inspiring stories and great thoughts--particularly when it comes to holding special services to honor the deceased and help the grieving fin community. His exposition on Jewish practices/rituals is particularly interesting.

The drawback comes in that the author seems undecided as to whether he believes people go straight or heaven--or simply "sleep" until Jesus comes. In one section he gives a blank check of credibility to near death experience in books such as 90 Minutes in Heaven, and Heaven is for Real--and then proceeds to touch on the fact that our hope is in resurrection not being an ethereal spirit floating around. He could have also spent a little more time outlining some more practical principles in how to behave in a hospital/home/church setting--he tends to repeat a lot in the latter half of the book.

Nonetheless, worth a read.

Maria says

This is a very well written book about an inevitable part of life -death; very real and practical.
