

# ON OUR WAY

Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life

edited by Dorothy C. Bass & Susan R. Briehl

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# 9\* Honoring the Body

Evelyn L. Parker

One Friday morning last spring, my mother called to tell me my father's condition had worsened. I packed a few things, made arrangements to miss an important meeting, and booked a flight from Dallas to New Orleans, the closest major airport to my hometown of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I was on my way to the airport within two hours, but traffic was very heavy. At the airport, flights were delayed by weather and overbooked by fans heading to the New Orleans Jazz Festival. I pulled my luggage from gate to gate, desperately seeking an earlier flight after learning that my scheduled flight would not get to Houston in time for my connecting flight. Finally I pleaded with an agent, "Please, I must get on this flight, my father is dying!" She looked at me with compassion, printed boarding passes to Houston and New Orleans, and sent me on my way with gentle words. "I'm sorry about your father," she said.

New Orleans was rainy and crowded, and my cousins Nathan and Verdeen were delayed in picking me up. We drove across Lake Pontchartrain toward Mississippi through blinding rain, staying the course with only the white center line as a guide, unaware of tornado warnings in the area. We arrived at my parents' house a little before 11:00 PM.

My father was lying in a hospital bed in the guest room, his six-foot three-inch body crammed into its metal frame. He was reaching upward and pointing with his right hand, mumbling words we couldn't understand. "It's Evelyn," I said, touching his arm in greeting and blessing. "I'm home." Nathan slept in the chair next to his beloved uncle all that night, while my mother and I retired to bedrooms nearby. Twice, my mother heard my father call out and, thinking he was dying, summoned me to come quickly to his bedside.

Early the next morning, my cousins and mother joined me around my father's bed for our traditional family devotion. My dad's parents had had devotions every Sunday morning with their children and later their grandchildren, kneeling in a circle before a breakfast of hot biscuits, fresh churned butter, syrup, rice, bacon, eggs, and fresh milk. My parents had continued this with my brother and me each Christmas morning. Now, while my father continued to move and mumble restlessly, we sat around his bed and sang one of his favorite songs, "He Understands, He'll Say 'Well Done.'" We took turns reading Romans 8:18-39, the wonderful passage about how *nothing* can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Then we knelt around his bed, each of us touching his body, each of us praying aloud. I had complete confidence that he was praying too.

A stream of visitors that would last all day started around 9:00 AM. In midmorning, the hospice nurse arrived. My father's pulse was eighty-three, she said, but she could not get a blood pressure reading. This usually meant that a patient would die within seventy-two hours, she told us as she began to cry. Seeing our love and care for my father moved her to tears, she said.

At eight o'clock that evening, my mother and I decided that my dad might be more comfortable if we gave him a bath. My sister-in-law, Yvette, once a hospice social worker, and my nephew's wife, Johnnita, a former nurse's assistant, offered to help. When we lifted my dad to place a turning sheet under his hips, he began to struggle. Cradling his long legs in my arm as I lifted them, I told him I would not let him fall. My mother washed his face; my task was to wash his body.

I prepared warm sudsy water in a basin and wet a small white towel. After his tee shirt was lifted over his head, I washed his chest, neck, and arms,

being careful not to rub too hard. Then using the same pattern I washed his legs. While I was concerned to clean his body, I avoided washing his groin. It seemed disrespectful for a daughter to see the private parts of her father; I was ashamed to look at him. Yvette and Johnnita admonished me to get on with it or they would have to bathe him themselves. Determined to fulfill that responsibility, I took a deep breath and lifted his underwear. As I began to wash between his legs, my fear, shame, and embarrassment subsided. We turned him over, and he relaxed as I gently rubbed the warm wet towel over his back, hips, and legs. Yvette suggested that I put a little baby powder on him, and he seemed to enjoy the way it felt. We dressed him in clean bedclothes and turned him on his left side. He became more peaceful, no longer struggling. "Pop just wanted to be clean," commented Yvette. "Yes," I agreed. "My dad has always been a sharp dresser."

“Caring for my father as he died helped me to understand God's love, and the love of my father, more fully.”

We left his side when four friends arrived. One, a preacher who walked the track with my dad at the YMCA, began to pray; I could hear his passionate words from the dining room. As soon as the men left, someone said, "I think he's gone." I ran into the room and sat in the bed beside my father. I checked the pulse on his wrist and then his neck. Nothing. I placed my hand over his eyes, but there was no response. Frantically, I asked everyone to sing, once more, "He Understands, He'll Say 'Well Done.'" As we sang, I felt a calming peace.

When we finished singing, it was 8:45 PM on May 3, 2008. The man who played basketball when he was a teen and exercised at the YMCA until it became too painful for him, the man who loved to wear stylish suits, the man who rested from hard work in the garden with a tall glass of ice water, the man who loved to eat at full buffet restaurants, the man who

often enjoyed deep belly laughs but was not afraid to let others see him cry—this man had now passed on to the great realm of saints, to be among our cloud of witnesses.

All my life, my father had helped me to know God's unconditional love toward me. Caring for my father as he died helped me to understand God's love, and the love of my father, more fully. Love, I now saw, is not just an emotion. Love is also tangible—touchable and embodied. God's love for us, and ours for one another.

## \*The Human Body as God's Tangible Grace

Grace becomes tangible through God's gift of the human body. This gift is also what allows us to be in relationship with others. Our bodies, given out of God's own goodness and created in God's own image, house the essence of who we are as beings of body, mind, and spirit. Our bodies hold the characteristics that make us unique: our values, beliefs, attitudes, hopes, dreams, fears, identities. Our bodies are an intricate design of DNA, RNA, chromosomes, ribosomes, and all the organelles inside each of our billions of cells which orchestrates the touchable organ we call "the body." Praise God for the gift of the human body, God's artistic creation of flesh and bones, muscle and connective tissue, systems and structures.

Our bodies also have the capacity to hold and reveal the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" the apostle Paul asked the bickering congregation in Corinth not once but twice. So then, "glorify God in your body," he urged, hoping his readers would honor God by honoring their bodies and the bodies of others as the dwelling place of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20). The human body was created to shelter the Holy Spirit, who yearns to dwell in communion with our spirit, the two together in our bodies.

When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, Jesus says in the Gospel of John, we receive an "Advocate," which means one who speaks on behalf of another. This Advocate speaks for Jesus, bearing witness about God's saving love to each of us, and also through us to others. The indwelling Spirit is also the Spirit of Truth, who teaches and reminds us of everything Jesus has said (John 14:26), leading us in the way and truth of Jesus (John 16:13). And the Spirit imparts Christ's peace (John 14:27). Imagine what

it might mean for our bodies to be “temples” of all this! It would mean that we too would become advocates, and truthful ones, and sources of comfort, peace, and encouragement to others. It would mean empowerment for wholesome human relationships.

The sense that advocacy, knowledge, and care for others go hand in hand differs from the sense that truth is best gained by detachment, which is the dominant view in modern Western culture. This connection between knowledge and loving relationship resembles what feminist theoreticians call “women’s ways of knowing,” which emphasize relationality and care rather than distance and “objectivity.” Faithful participation in practices like those described in this book requires both truthful

“ Our bodies are an intricate design of DNA, RNA, chromosomes, ribosomes, and all the organelles inside each of our billions of cells which orchestrates the touchable organ we call ‘the body.’ ”

knowing and caring relationship, seamlessly woven together. Consider those who practice justice or peacemaking. In recent years, student activists have been moved by both empathy and research as they become advocates on behalf of those whose bodies are at risk of mutilation and slaughter. For example, a Harvard student group advocating on behalf of people harmed by Sudanese genocide persuaded the Harvard Corporation to divest \$4.4 million in holdings of stock in PetroChina Company Limited, which was supporting the violence in Darfur. Advocacy against crimes that destroy human bodies is a form of relationship that goes beyond face-to-face contact, a form of the practice of honoring the body as it emerges in public life.

Wholesome relationships, empowered by the Spirit and shaped by the practice of honoring the body, enable us to share God's love by becoming means of tangible grace to other human bodies. Such relationships invite unity in purpose among friends, colleagues, and team members, and even with those who were only recently strangers. I learned this during a ropes-course exercise with a group of teenagers attending a program at Perkins School of Theology, where I teach. On this course, challenging games require an entire group to work together to complete a difficult physical task rather than setting individuals against one another in competition. On the day I am remembering, some participants shouted "you can do it" or "way to go" and cheered each time a team member took a step on the wires thirty feet above the ground. Others untangled ropes and kept them accessible, while leaders made sure safety hooks were properly attached. All of us used our bodies, in one way or another, to support, catch, and brace the others; and our voices encouraged and guided them. Each person's body was important as we built community and reached our goals.

Handshakes, hugs, pats on the back, and kisses communicate affection and affirmation. All of these are acts of tangible grace, small ways our bodies bear God's grace to others. So are the high fives, belly bumps, and hip slaps shared by athletes, or the handshakes and occasional hugs offered by opposing teams in counterstreaming single-file lines.

Such gestures are not shared equally with all, and sometimes they carry subtle disrespect. A firm handshake can express the giver's confidence and her respect for the receiver, while a limp handshake can express diminished confidence or a lack of affirmation. And when one person refuses to shake the extended hand of another, it might be a sign of rejection or disapproval, possibly reflecting differences in race or class. I've heard hurt or outrage from African Americans who extended their hands to European Americans who refused to take their hands in response. And I've noticed that homeless people never offer a handshake while sharing moments of fellowship with those who volunteer in shelters and soup kitchens. Like other marginalized people, those who are homeless usually wait for the extended hand of those more fortunate. By simple gestures one body can bear, or deny, grace to another.



## \*The Body of Christ

Christians speak of the church as “the body of Christ.” This image, drawn from the letters of the apostle Paul, describes us as “members” (as in legs and arms) of one whole and unified entity. Moreover, this image reminds us that the church—with all its members—is God’s body in the world, called to bear God’s grace to others through appropriate touch.

When I served on the staff of Northaven United Methodist Church, a reconciling congregation in Dallas, I learned a valuable lesson about the importance of touch and how touch can express the gift of God’s love. Several persons in the congregation had shared that they had AIDS or were HIV-positive. As head of the youth ministry program, I worked with some of these individuals who had volunteered as youth counselors. While I did not hesitate to touch them, I would slip away to wash my hands after shaking the hands of those who were suffering from full-blown AIDS. I did this knowing that one cannot contract the virus from a handshake.

One Sunday morning, immediately after my ritual of hand washing, I hurried into the sanctuary to assist in serving Communion. When worshipers gathered around the table, I moved around the circle, breaking off a portion of the Communion bread and pressing it into the palm of each person’s hand. As I did this, I looked into each person’s eyes and said, “The body of Christ, broken for you.” Soon I came to a parishioner I knew had AIDS; in fact, less than an hour before, I had washed my hands after shaking his. I looked into his eyes and began to repeat the words assuring him that Christ’s body was broken for him. At that moment, I heard the Holy Spirit’s words of conviction: “Will you deny me, Evelyn?” I wept, ashamed that I had set conditions on touching those people the world labels as untouchable.

Serving Communion to those suffering from AIDS was transforming for me, but for a time the transformation remained incomplete. I stopped secretly washing my hands, but I still made assumptions about people who had HIV/AIDS. A year later, I moved away to go to graduate school. During my first semester I received the sad news that one of my youth counselors, as well as two other members of the congregation, had died from AIDS. During the weeks that followed, I dealt with the shock of losing this friend, but I never truly grieved his death or the deaths of the other parishioners. Then I saw the movie *Philadelphia*, which tells the story of a

man who lives with AIDS and finally dies of it. As that powerful film ended and the credits began to roll, I found myself sobbing. My body could no longer suppress the release of bottled-up grief. Alone in the theater, I felt as if I had been crying forever and would never be able to stop. Those tears carried me the second step as I learned truly to honor the bodies of those living, and dying, with AIDS.

The people of Northaven United Methodist Church blessed me with transformative grace. As years pass, I am more and more thankful for this congregation and others like it. When it stands without shame or apology in solidarity with human beings who have been rejected and marginalized by society, the church becomes a sign of God's tangible grace in and for the world. When this happens, the church, the body of Christ, opens its arms to the homeless, the sick, the poor, and all who suffer. The early church did this, ministering to the needs of widows and orphans and caring for members of the community—"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (see 1 Cor. 12:25-27).

We share God's tangible grace every day in face-to-face, hand-to-hand ways. We also share it through action and advocacy for political, economic, and social policies that aim to promote the well-being of those in physical need. Some denominations make policy statements on hunger, health care, housing, and other issues. When members live out these stands through their way of life and worship, the policies become living documents made of flesh and blood, and we see that working in feeding programs and advocating for policies that address the root causes of hunger go hand in hand. Finally, in humility, we lift all of our efforts to God in song and prayer, trusting God to make of us signs of tangible grace in our communities and throughout the world.

In the doctrine of the Incarnation, Christians speak of the flesh-and-blood body of Jesus, whom we worship as Christ ("the anointed one"). Our creeds declare that this body was conceived and born, suffered, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead. Jesus was and is God's grace in utterly tangible form, God's grace in the flesh, God's Word made flesh:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived

among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.—John 1:1-2, 14

This is the in-carnation, the en-fleshing, of the second Person of the Trinity, who became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. Enfleshed, Jesus lived with human beings. Enfleshed, he modeled all the practices discussed in this book.

Christians know God's gift of tangible grace, then, through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, through the church, and through our own bodies in relationship with other human bodies. At the same time, all of these can be sites of suffering. Being enfleshed, being embodied—for us and also for Jesus—includes vulnerability, suffering, and death. Sometimes, awareness of such limits makes us treasure the human body even more, as I did when giving my father his last bath. But sometimes we feel overwhelmed or frightened and don't want to look at or be near those who are suffering; we want to wash our hands of them, as I did at Northaven United Methodist Church.

Jesus stays close to those who suffer throughout his ministry, and at the end of his life he suffers alongside others who are also being shunned and tortured as they die. With the resurrection of Jesus, however, God insists that suffering is not the end, that life is stronger than death, and that the body is deeply important to true life and relationship. "Touch me and see," the risen Christ says, "for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). New life in Christ is not only a spiritual reality, the disciples learn, and Christians now insist; it is a life received in the body, in a world full of many other beautiful, broken, and often suffering bodies. And we live this life not only for ourselves but also as tangible grace to others, even though we are wounded and vulnerable and so are they. "The Christian practice of honoring the body," says Stephanie Paulsell,

“Being enfleshed, being embodied—  
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author of this book's chapter on friendship and intimacy, "requires that we view the world through the lens of Jesus' wounded but resurrected body." Jesus' broken body, she continues, "brings into focus the bodies of the sick and the wounded and the exploited. His resurrection shows us the beauty God intends for all bodies. As we love and suffer, as we seek God and each other, with our bodies, we remember that every body is blessed by God, deserving of protection and care."

When we offer one another protection and care, we communicate God's blessing to each other, even in the midst of the brokenness that we also experience. When we honor actual bodies, our own and those of others, we express gratitude to God for being with us, in the midst of suffering and mortality, as tangible grace. We practice this blessing, this grace, in many large and small ways, as part of our everyday life.

### \*Clean or Unclean?

Some of my fondest memories of bathing come from when I was about six years old, and my parents and I lived with my maternal grandmother in the rural area of Covington County, Mississippi. We didn't have indoor plumbing, so I bathed in a large round galvanized tub set in the middle of the bedroom floor. My mother would mix hot water from the kettle with cold from the well until the temperature was just right, and stepping into the tub was a very pleasurable experience. I washed my face and ears as my mom instructed, and then she washed my back and worked on the rough skin of my tomboyish elbows and knees. I would sit and soak a while, then ask for more warm water so I could enjoy being there a little longer.

When I make time to enjoy a leisurely bath today, the pleasure never equals what I remember from my childhood. Perhaps my mother's presence reminded me of being in the waters of her womb. Perhaps I miss the love and care I received each time she touched my body or combed my hair. Her hands taught me the meaning of appropriate touch, and her massaging my scalp and curly tresses in shampoo was sheer delight. In these acts, my mother was God's tangible grace to me, and in a way I was (and I am) God's tangible grace to her as well. She expressed her gratitude to God for the gift of her girl-child by bathing my body and washing my hair.

“Cleanliness is next to godliness,” she sometimes said, justifying her relentless scrubbing of elbows and knees. This common saying actually reflects a major pattern in ancient and contemporary religious practice. Cleaning up has long been one of the ways in which human beings prepare to enter the presence of God—a pattern we see, for example, in Leviticus, a biblical book that includes laws defining “clean” and “unclean” and mandating specific rituals of cleansing. In a sense, my own childhood baths were also rituals meant to prepare me for worship. They came on Saturday evenings, timed to prepare my body for Sunday services at our little country church, Mt. Pleasant Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church. I was being made clean so that I could worship God in the sanctuary.

In spite of my pleasant memories of bath time, the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” has some disturbing overtones. My sense of well-being was often shattered when the congregation sang hymns that included quite different images of what it meant to be washed. I remember one with great clarity: “Nothing but the Blood.” The images in this hymn troubled me deeply when I thought in the concrete way that children do, and they still cause cognitive dissonance when I listen with the abstract thinking of an adult.

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus;  
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
Oh! precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;  
No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Where was the logic in this—that something red and gross could make anything white and pure? And did some of those singing with me actually desire to become “white as snow”? How does a young African American come to terms with the meaning of these words? The metaphor of blood making one white as snow never worked for me and many others. These words contradict affirmation of the black body as a gift from God.

The notion that black bodies are “unclean”—not just with dust from the playground but in a larger sense that defines black bodies as unholy—has a long history, and notions of black bodies becoming white through the uncleanness of blood are not new either. I’m glad my mother never

tried to persuade me to embrace the theology of that song. What I did embrace was the care of my body by a beloved parent.

Later in life, I realized that my Saturday-night baths did connect to my parents' pledge before God and the congregation to nurture their baby girl in the love of Christ as a baptized Christian. In my denomination, the sacrament of baptism is extended to infants and children as well as adults. During the ritual act of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, parents, guardians, godparents, aunts, uncles, and a host of caregivers pledge to keep the child close to the ministry of the church until she, by the grace of God, publicly accepts the gift of salvation and receives confirmation and full membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. The congregation also pledges to be a living example of Christ through the power of the Spirit and to love and teach the child. Every time I witness a baptism, I remember with thanksgiving my own baptism, even though the memory lives in my spirit rather than in my mind.

For those who remember baptism, water can bring comfort too deep for words. Kay Northcutt, a pastor and writer, tells of assisting her dying mother to bathe. "The water," Kay recalls, "sounded like baptism. Holy, quiet, small splashes." Water comforts in part because it brings the satisfaction of being physically clean, as my father seemed to feel after his last bath. But such washing also restores to relationship those who are marginalized, who are made "unclean" and separated from others because they are old and sick. As in baptism, God's grace is in the water and in the loving touch of others upon bodies created in God's image.

### **\*Getting Dressed for Church, and for Life**

When babies are baptized, some parents dress them in white heirloom dresses and bonnets trimmed with delicate embroidery. Baptismal garments, though varying in different Christian communities, express the new identity of becoming a member of the household of Christ. In Eastern Orthodoxy, a baptismal robe symbolizing light and the fullness of divine grace is worn by the newly baptized for eight days after the adult or child's baptism by immersion in a pool of water. This robe declares that the new Christian has "put on Christ" and is now clothed in his goodness and love. The apostle Paul wrote, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

Clothing protects our naked bodies from exposure to heat, cold, and the gaze of others. Clothing can also reveal identity. Hip-hop break dancers adorn themselves in sagging jeans and oversized tee-shirts—clothing that allows freedom to tumble, spin upside down, or moonwalk across the floor. Punk rockers wear black denim pants, jackets decorated with metal studs, and spiked hair in green, black, purple, or any combination of colors. Sorority sisters or fraternity brothers boast shirts or jackets sporting Greek letters. And sometimes adornment goes right on the skin, in tattoos, body piercings, and body art.

Many religious communities have also placed great importance on clothing. Some have set their members apart by adopting clothing to identify their community and show their values, such as habits for monks and nuns or plain clothing for the Amish. In other traditions, “Sunday-go-to-meeting” clothes have expressed respect for the presence of God. Clothing helps to shape identity, all these groups have sensed.

In some African-American church traditions, adorning one’s body for Sunday worship follows a strict cultural code. Women are instructed to wear modest long-sleeved dresses that are long enough to fall to or below the knees. Bright colors such as red or hot pink and, in some places, pants have been prohibited for women. My paternal grandmother, a church mother in the Baptist tradition, followed this practice to the letter. When her daughters or granddaughters came to visit, we were not allowed to wear pants at all, let alone to church.

Some African-American women have resisted such dress codes in creative ways, while others have rebelled and abandoned them. Those who do like to dress up often adorn their heads with hats or (for younger African-American women) creative hairstyles. “Sundays are a precious gift to hard-working women who have labored unceasingly through the workweek,” notes the poet and novelist Maya Angelou. “And then Hallelujah, Hosanna! Sunday morning comes. If the woman is African American, she has some fancy hatboxes on a shelf in her closet. . . . She may try on each hat two or three times before she dresses, just to see which one goes with her most recent hairdo.” Some black women do not feel fully dressed until they adorn their heads with a precious crown (hat). Some reject this notion—but almost all black women appreciate a stunning hat or hairdo. These hairdos are permed, natural, long or straight, and black, blonde, brown,

or red, standing high above the head in artistic design or close to the skull like a cap.

How we dress and groom ourselves can be empowering, but it can also engender self-doubt and financial problems. Our desire to look good can lead us to allow media to dictate what we need to “be beautiful”—something few people can match. Peers influence our ideas of beauty as well, often in ways that make us feel doubtful and self-conscious. Many thus spend more on appearance than they can afford; the creation of elaborate hairdos is big business, and getting a new hairdo plus a manicure and pedicure can be expensive. Worrying too much about these things can result in hardship and heartbreak. We do best to remember Jesus’ words: “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these” (Matt. 6:28-29).

In my church and in many others, younger members are prompting the rest of us to become more easygoing about apparel. Not so long ago,

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some people said they didn’t go to church because they couldn’t afford to get their hair done or because they didn’t like to get dressed up and feared they would be shamed if they wore what they had. Now I know more people who reject such thoughts and come to church just as they are, because they want to be among people who accept them without regard to how they dress. These influences can even encourage people in the church to control their consumer habits and to resist dressing to impress. People are reminded that we are created in God’s image and clothed in Christ. What could be more beautiful?



## \*Rest and Recreation

Our bodies follow rhythms, as does all the created world. Our bodies need both recreation and rest if we are to maintain wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. For me, dancing is the most renewing form of recreation. I still enjoy dancing the Lindy Hop and the jitterbug moves I first learned from my dad at my eighth-grade formal, all dressed up in a hot-pink organza dress. Sometimes I'm brave enough to attempt hip-hop moves, just shy of break dancing. Dancing refreshes and relaxes me—and it brings together a community of people in the shared effort and pleasure of coordinated movement. I am most accountable to staying with the exercise my body needs when I exercise in the community of my jazz aerobic and salsa classes.

Rest—especially sleep—complements the recreation that comes through exertion. The proper amount of sleep heals wounds, helps with weight loss, maintains a healthy immune system, optimizes memory, and encourages emotional health. Few activities honor our bodies as richly as does sleep. Although sleep does not literally re-create our bodies, it does allow us to release our bodies into God's care. This too is part of what it means to live faithfully in and with the body God has provided each of us as tangible grace.

God's gift of tangible grace became real to me as I grew up under the dotting gaze of my father, and it took on deeper meaning in the final hours of his life. What a wonderful blessing to cradle my father's legs in my arms, stroke his forehead, and bathe his body as he transitioned from life to death. What a marvelous gift to touch his warm dying body and yet not fear the cold finality of death. What an amazing gift to discover in my father's dying a renewed sense of what it means to sing with others in worship:

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

It is God's intention that all children, whether young or grown or of ripe old age, should offer and receive such care, and in the end be given such rest.