

## Preparation for Endings

As we journey through life, we face countless endings. Friends drift away or move away. We move from a place we have called home for many years. What seemed a forever relationship turns out not to be forever. Our favorite restaurant or store closes. We leave a job that has been a constant in our life. Our children grow up and our role of parent is over. We find that we can no longer climb mountains or read or dance because our bodies are injured or aging. A group we have belonged to disbands. There are so many endings that disrupt the continuity of our lives.

Some endings we choose; others are thrust upon us. Some endings open up opportunities for something new that enriches our lives. At times we realize there is a need for change and deliberately end a relationship, a job, or activity and move on to something better. Other times we put off endings because we do not want to lose what we have or are afraid of what will come next in our lives. And still at other times, changes that we do not want happen in our lives and we must deal with them even when there is nothing good about them. The final ending, death, both for us and for of those we love, is inevitable.

Endings can bring a variety of emotions. When an ending leads to a new beginning, we can feel apprehension or excitement or even both simultaneously. Change that is forced on us may leave us feeling angry or powerless. Some endings are accompanied by a deep sense of loss. Mental health professionals such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross try to help us understand the stages of grief through which people move. However, people deal with loss in different ways and the process is not linear. Years after having to give up skiing, a person may feel sad or jealous when seeing another person fly down a snowy slope. A person may be totally at peace with the death of a grandmother but decades later tear up when hearing her favorite song. One function of religion is to help us deal with the final ending with concepts such as heaven, reincarnation, living on as a soul, or living on in memory.

Yes, endings, both large and small, are a ubiquitous part of life. Endings change our lives and change who we are as people. Some endings lead to new beginnings and bring about growth and opportunity. Other endings involve loss that breaks our hearts and compels us to deal with complex emotional reactions. Sometimes once we know how something ends, we look at the relationship or activity differently as we think about it in terms of the ending. Endings serve as road markers as we journey through our lives.

Below are a variety of thoughts for you to consider as you ponder the subject of endings.

There's a trick to the "graceful exit." It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, or a relationship is over – and let it go. It means leaving what's over without denying its validity or its past importance to our lives. It involves a sense of future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, that we are moving on rather than out. *Ellen Goodman*

I guess by now I should know enough about loss to realize that you never really stop missing someone – you just learn to live around the huge gaping hole of their absence. *Alyson Noël*

There's no such thing as a happy ending. The songs, books, and movies with "happy endings" all stop at the moment of triumph ... There are, however, good stopping places. *Shaun Hamill*

Every one of us is losing something precious to us. Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back again. That's part of what it means to be alive. *Haruki Murakami*

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.  
*T.S. Eliot*

It is always important to know when something has reached its end. Closing circles, shutting doors, finishing chapters, it doesn't matter what we call it; what matters is to leave in the past those moments in life that are over. *Paulo Coelho*

To live in this world  
you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;  
to hold it  
against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;  
and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.  
*Mary Oliver*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. Some endings you choose and some are thrust upon you. Reflect on an ending that you chose and one that was forced upon you.
2. Think of an ending that has resulted in an ongoing feeling of loss. What is that like?
3. Think of an ending that was initially painful but then led to new opportunities. How was the transition for you?
4. In your life, what might be ending for you now? What is beginning or might be about to begin?

## **Ending of our group:**

5. What is something you appreciate about this group as it has been?
6. What are the insights and gifts of wisdom you've found during the year? In yourself? From the others in your covenant group?
7. As a result of this group, how have you changed?

## **Words of the Day**

Think of something in your life that might be coming to an end. The Words of the Day is to complete this sentence: In my life these days, I am reflecting on the ending of ...

\*\*\* In addition, be prepared to name a characteristic or quality you admire for each member of the group. We will share these words or phrases with each other in a closing ritual. \*\*\*