

Stay of Execution

**How to Negotiate With God When
You Have Under Six Months To Live**

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In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day? And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz (II Chronicles 32:24-31).

This book is dedicated to the memory of my son

Caleb North

who was never told he was terminal

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Introduction

“You’re terminal.”

Your physician probably did not put it this bluntly. They never do. They feel uneasy about telling patients they’re terminal. Physicians want to break it to them gently. They say things like this: “The specialist has confirmed my worst concerns.” If it’s cancer, he says this: “You should start chemotherapy as soon as possible.” If it’s not cancer, he says this: “Unless this experimental treatment is successful, there is nothing more I can do.”

The worst thing you can hear is this: “You should get your affairs in order.” When a physician turns you over to your lawyer, you’re terminal.

What next? My friend, the late Murray Rothbard, once said this: “When they tell me I’m terminal, I’ll look for a quack.” That makes sense. If conventional medicine won’t cure you, then an unconventional method might. Compared to certain death, what can it hurt, other than your pocketbook? But schedule a visit with your lawyer anyway. Be realistic. (In Rothbard’s case, he had no warning. He died from a heart attack in a barber’s chair.)

A Swiss psychologist, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, had her book published in 1969: *On Death and Dying*. It became a classic. She offered this thesis. A typical patient who has been diagnosed as incurably terminal goes through five emotional stages. They may not

occur in this order, but this order was presented in the book. It became widely known.

The five stages are:

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

I am assuming that you have gone through the first two stages. You were in denial for a while. You got a second opinion from another physician. Then you may have gone to an unconventional healer. But, at some point, you finally concluded that you're terminal.

Then maybe you got angry. This is the stupid stage. It gets dying people nowhere. Who should they blame? If they blame God, this cuts off stage three – the fallback position: bargaining. Anyway, it decreases the odds of a favorable negotiation. Who else is there to blame? The cosmos? Sorry, but the cosmos didn't do it to you. The cosmos doesn't care about you, one way or the other.

Like most Americans, I go to movie scenes to make key points. On the issue of anger over death, *Patch Adams* is my favorite. Adams, who is played by Robin Williams,

is a medical student. He goes to a hospital to cheer up people with his humor. One patient is a truly hard case. He is always angry. He yells at the nurses. He throws things. He is played by Peter Coyote. One night, Adams goes into his room. He is dressed as heaven's least convincing angel. He begins to read Coyote a list of colloquial euphemisms for death. Coyote's reaction is the right one. I have posted the clip on my website. I hope YouTube does not pull it down for copyright violation. It is a classic scene. It lasts two minutes.

<http://bit.ly/PatchAdamsAngel>

I have three goals for this little book. First, to get you healthy again. Second, failing that, to get you by stage four: depression. "Go directly to acceptance. Do not pass depression." Third, to help you deal effectively and realistically with a sixth factor, one which is present in all five stages: fear.

With this as background, it is time for Chapter 1: "How to Structure Your Offer."

Chapter 1

How to Structure Your Offer

You have made a decision. It is time to negotiate.

With whom?

This is a major decision. If you shook your fist at God in stage two, you will begin negotiations at a serious disadvantage. An apology is in order.

If you are an atheist, you now find yourself in a symbolic foxhole. Why does being terminal bother you at this late date? You have been in this symbolic foxhole all your life. You knew you were terminal from about the age of five – six at the latest. But, with the official medical prognosis behind you two stages ago, you are now willing to reconsider the question of God's non-existence. More than this: maybe God is open to negotiations.

I am here to tell you that He is.

I begin with the first three steps of Alcoholics Anonymous's famous 12 steps.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as

we understood Him.

You are powerless to slow down the ticking clock – in an era in which digital clocks do not tick. You are at least willing to test the idea that a Power greater than you can restore you to statistically average life expectancy for someone your age – and maybe a little extra. Finally, you are willing to one degree or other to turn whatever remains of your life to God . . . as you understand him. You probably don't understand much.

At the end of this little book, you will understand more.

Alcoholics Anonymous has restored millions of seemingly hopeless alcoholics to sobriety all over the world. I take the program seriously. I take the 12 steps seriously. I take the first three steps very seriously.

Maybe you aren't sure. Most AA first-meeting attendees are not sure. I suspect that all of them are not sure. But, they think, correctly, "what have I got to lose?"

AA members often experience rock-bottom before they join. Something happens to them that persuades them that, if they do not sober up and stay sober, they are going to die. Soon. The booze will kill them. Soon. This is the alcoholic's equivalent of "You're terminal." It is an accurate assessment.

You have come to the same realization. You are now ready to begin negotiating.

Here are two initial offers you can make. They seek the same outcome: *a stay of execution*. They offer the same payment: *service*. But they are structured differently.

Offer #1

God, I have come to the end of my rope. I should have come to you earlier, but better late than never, I always say. I don't want to die. I mean "die yet." Of course I'm going to die. I know that. I have always known that. But now you have my attention. I prefer to die later. So, here's the deal. If you will cure me of this disease, I promise to do the following:

[present the list].

Offer #2

God, I have come to the end of my rope. I should have come to you earlier, but better late than never, I always say. I don't want to die. I mean "die yet." Of course I'm going to die. I know that. I have always known that. But now you have my attention. I prefer to die later. Here's the deal. I have work to do. I have good things that I want to leave behind. If I die soon, I will not be able to finish any of these projects. I am hereby surrendering myself and my work to you. I will give you credit for all of it. It's your call. [Present the list.]

Which offer do you think will get God's attention? Which is He likely to take more seriously?

Which offer would get your attention? Which offer would you take more seriously?

Here is a better offer, which you are not in a position to make.

God, I'm back again. You know I have not been angry. I am no longer in denial. That didn't last long, anyway. You know that I have been involved in several major long-term projects for your kingdom. I am not going to be able to finish them if I die soon. I think they are all worthwhile. I always have done my best to finish any project I started on your behalf. But now I cannot finish them if I die. These are the main ones: [present the list]. I have also been thinking about starting these: [present the second list]. But it's your call.

If you went through the anger stage, then you are probably not in a position to make this offer. Making offers to God is new to you. You haven't got much capital in reserve to offer.

As I will cover in a subsequent chapter, *you haven't got anything in reserve to offer*. It's the thought that counts.

Now I am going to suggest another offer. I think it's better than either of the first two, although it's not as good as the third.

God, it took me a while, but I finally get the picture. I have had a good life. Compared to how most people have lived in history, or live in a Chinese village today, I am rich. I have accomplished a lot. I never fully appreciated this before. Now that I am about to lose it, I see this far more clearly. Thank you for what I have been given so far. I now see that it has been your gift to me, and I never thanked you for it. I would like to show my appreciation in a token way. I have some things I should have done a long time ago. I am willing to start them. But I am almost out of time. If you would extend my life, I will start these projects. If you give me even more time, I will finish them. [Present the list.]

Think through these offers. You are not ready to make the list, but you are in a position to structure the offer. Will it be offer #1, #2, or #4?

Chapter 2

How NOT to Negotiate With God

Have you ever made New Year's resolutions that you didn't keep? List them.

Let's make this easier. Have you ever made New Year's resolutions that you *did* keep? List them.

You get the idea. People promise all kinds of things that they don't deliver. This is especially true of promises to themselves.

Here is my suggestion: *treat God better than you have treated yourself*. Don't make promises to God that you will not keep.

The price may seem low when you're terminal. You may think: "Look, I'm dying. When it comes to offers, the sky's the limit!" This sounds reasonable now. What about later?

As I mentioned earlier, I often think in terms of movie scenes. I have a favorite scene for negotiating with God. It is at the end of a 1978 movie starring Burt Reynolds: *The End*. It is about a man in your situation. He doesn't get to the negotiating stage until the end of the movie. He goes through depression before he negotiates. This is a bad idea. He decides to end it all. He decides to kill himself. He tries several times, only to fail. He just cannot seem to get anything right. Finally, he swims out in the Pacific Ocean. Way out. Then, floundering, he comes to his senses. What has he done? This makes no sense.

He is killing himself because he is dying. Dumb!

He decides to swim back to shore. But he had done too good a job when swimming out. He is far from the shore, and he is out of strength. How can he get back to shore?

Now he gets to what is normally stage three. He starts to swim. As he slowly moves back to the shore, he begins to negotiate with God. Amazingly, he gains strength. So, predictably, he continues the negotiating process . . . to get better terms. The scene is on YouTube. I posted this for my subscribers in 2012. See it here:

<http://bit.ly/BurtSwims>

The Bible has something to say about this. It appears in the Book of Proverbs, which was compiled by King Solomon over 3,000 years ago. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Proverbs 5:4-5). (Note: I use the King James Version. There are lots of *shouldests* and *shouldest nots* in it. I use the King James because its English is powerful. Second, it is still the most widely purchased Bible translation in the United States, by a long shot. If you own a Bible, it is probably a KJV.)

You know how hard it is to lose weight. People start a diet, but they do not stick to it. This is also curious: the fatter they are, and the more they need to lose weight, the less

likely they are to stick with the weight-loss program. You would think that severely obese people would be so motivated by the fear of dying early that they would do anything to lose weight. You would be wrong.

You must begin to estimate what your life is worth to you. I mean *really* worth to you. I mean worth to you after God grants you your request.

If you don't think that God will grant you your request, why are you thinking about making an offer to Him? Is this like some kind of long-shot bet at the race track: a trifecta, maybe? Is this like buying a ticket for the lottery? "Yes, the odds are long, but you never know." Do you regard God the way that you regard winning the \$10 million Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes – "no purchase required"?

Let me quote Jesus: *count the cost* (Luke 14:28-30). Don't up the ante just because the stakes are so high today. If you get well, the stakes won't seem that high. But if you made the offer, the stakes will still be that high.

If you take me seriously about this, you're going to have to do a serious self-assessment. How much are a few more years of life worth to you? This gets us to the fourth step in the AA 12-step program: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." To this add a searching and fearless *economic* inventory of yourself.

How much are you worth to yourself?

How much are you worth to those who are dependent on you?

How much are you worth to God?

This will be a painful exercise if you do it fearlessly. You may experience what is sometimes called the shock of recognition. But you had better do it. The outcome may affect your offer.

You want to make a good offer – an offer worth accepting. But you had better not try to impress God on the front end. He is well aware of what your back-end payments are going to be. He will judge accordingly. He will run a cost-benefit analysis of your offer – the back-end costs and benefits, not just your front-end offer.

You must test the level of your commitment. You must test it in terms of four commitments: (1) to life, (2) to God, (3) to yourself, and (4) to others who are dependent on you.

Keep in mind the power of bad habits. The new AA member is told this: “Attend 90 meetings in 90 days.” This rule recognizes how difficult it is to break bad habits. It can be done, but not at zero cost.

You need a written plan in advance that will pressure you to pay your end of the bargain. Written. As in “contract.” Don’t just tell God what you’re going to pay. Write down exactly how you are going to pay it. In time and money. What will you give up, in time and money?

This is serious negotiating. Serious negotiating is what is called for at this point in your life.

Chapter 3

What Do You Bring to the Table?

You may not have given much thought to this before. This is why AA has the fourth step: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” Most people never sit down and make such an inventory. You are considering it now only because you are in a special situation. It’s not just that you’re terminal. Everybody is terminal. It’s because you are terminal with a tight deadline. This is a real deadline, as the word implies. Dead.

In making the assessment, you have to think back. What have you accomplished so far? As with everyone, there are pluses and minuses. Most people think that, on the whole, or on average, or overall, they are in the plus column. They think of this as keeping score. They tend to remember the pluses and forget the minuses. They figure that as long as we have won more games than they have lost, they’re winners. They don’t consider this possibility: what if the score is calculated by multiplication? Multiply the points you made in all of the games. Here’s the problem: it’s like baseball. You did not score in at least one of the games. *That single zero turns the result into zero.* I’ll get to this in a later chapter.

Anyway, do the inventory. This will give you some indication of what you are capable of achieving. You have already proven yourself to some extent . . . as long as you

don't add up the minuses. Just the ones you remember can add up pretty fast.

In planning the list of things you plan to offer, keep it reasonable. Don't expect to be able to achieve output that, given what you have accomplished so far – net – that you will be able to double it or triple it, long term. We hear these days of sustainable this and sustainable that. That's what you have to consider. What is sustainable? Right now, you're in a sprint. The finish line is getting closer by the minute. But if you get a stay of execution, you won't be in a sprint. You will be back in a marathon. Keep this in mind.

There is something else to keep in mind. You will be tempted to evaluate the net worth of your life's work so far in terms of its value to you. This is not the way to assess the value of your output. What do you think it is worth to God? Maybe you have accumulated a high net worth. You did it honestly – mostly. You didn't hurt anybody – too often. So, what did you do with the money? It may not be all pluses. Keep an eye on the minuses, from God's point of view.

Doing the inventory may depress you. Remember, one of the goals I have for this book is to enable you to skip stage four: depression. Now, here I am, telling you to go through an exercise that could be depressing. But it has to be done. The folks at AA are correct. Being depressed about what you have accomplished so far has to do with the past. Being depressed about the imminent end of the race is a horse of a different color.

You can change. That is the message of this chapter. What you have done so far is only an indicator. As the lawyers require in investment prospectus ads, "past performance

is no guarantee of future performance.” This also applies to mediocre past performance.

Doing the self-inventory is an exercise in reality, not fantasy. You may have been living in a fantasy world. The noisily ticking clock has restored a sense of reality. It was ticking all along, but you ignored it. The sound faded into the background as white noise. The signal-to-noise ratio went negative. Now, it’s positive. You can hear it.

I want you to make a realistic offer. To get God to take it seriously, you must take it seriously. I am helping you to take your offer seriously.

Here is the good news. *You can’t buy God’s favor.* If you had to buy His favor, your clock would have stopped ticking a long time ago. Whatever you have achieved on the positive side so far was God’s gift to you. He would like you to acknowledge this. And all those negatives – what about them? God has been gracious here, too. He has deferred counting them so far. He is still deferring. That is why your clock is still ticking. You have had a stay of execution – maybe several. Now you want another one.

Then what is the list all about? Why should you try to lengthen it with as much stuff as you can? Because it is a token. It is a token of your thanks. It’s like a small child’s gift to his father. The value of the gift to the father is not its market value. As I said before, it’s the thought that counts. Its value to the father is based on the sacrifice that went into it.

How much sacrifice should you put into it?

Chapter 4

How Big a Sacrifice Should You Make?

In life, there is an inescapable trade-off: time vs. money. Ben Franklin offered this aphorism: “A child thinks that \$20 and 20 years can never be spent.” He made that observation back when \$20 bought a lot more. (Actually, he said pounds, not dollars.)

As we get more money, we run low on time. It takes time to accumulate money. This is why, after age 70, the value of money fades, and the value of time increases.

You are probably under 70. But the value of your remaining time has escalated. The value of money has fallen, except insofar as money may buy you time. But your physician has already shut that window of opportunity.

Maybe God will open it.

God doesn't need your money. You already know that. But He also doesn't need your service. This may not have occurred to you. Here is reality: *God doesn't need anything you possess or will ever possess.* We're talking about God here, not Walmart. He is in the supply business, but unlike Walmart, He is not in the sales business. There is no cash register at the front of a long line. There is no bar code reader. There is no credit card swipe machine.

If God were in the high-volume life-extension business, He might be more ready to exchange a stay of execution for a longer list of sacrifices. But whatever you promise to

hand over to him after your stay of execution, He will provide it for you to hand over. He has been doing this from the beginning, but it took “you’re terminal” to call your attention to the fact. Maybe you still have not recognized it.

What kind of God do you think you are dealing with? Is He more likely to grant a stay of execution to someone who has demonstrated great self-discipline in the past? Is He likely to ignore the offer of someone who has been profligate in the past, and who is barely able to conceive of what serious sacrifice is?

You are not involved in some sort of auction for future sacrifices. God is not a cosmic auctioneer. He is not calling out this: “I hear ten hours a week mowing lawns for impoverished widows. Do I hear eleven?”

Then Who are you dealing with? What is this really all about? It is about *humility* – yours, not God’s. It is about God’s announcement: “You cannot buy my favor, but you can demonstrate that I finally have got your attention.” He got your attention with these words: “You’re terminal.”

The size of your sacrifice indicates the extent of your awareness of the deficit condition you are in, and have been in for a long time. You are not making up for lost time. You are making up for deafness. And blindness. And the lack of a fearless self-inventory of your moral condition.

With your list of promised sacrifices, you are saying: “I get it. I get it to this extent.”

Do you get it? To what extent?

What can you do to say clearly and honestly, “I get it”? This will be an extension of who you think you are, and far more important, who you would like to become. Your list will say: “This is who I want to become.”

Who do you want to become?

You are going to need help. This is what making the list is all about with respect to getting God’s attention. He is interested in seeing your estimation of what you have been so far, what you would like to become, what it will cost for you to make the transition and – above all – how much help you will need. Ask yourself these questions:

1. How much help will I need?
2. Where can I get this help?
3. Why do I think I will get it?

The third question is the kicker. Why *do* you think you will get it? If your answer is, “because I deserve it,” you still don’t get it.

I don’t know how much time you plan to allocate to this process. First, you must do the moral self-inventory. Second, you must do a time-management estimate of how you will spend your days if you get a stay of execution. Here is where you allocate time for your sacrifices. You probably will not be able to spend a lot of extra money on this,

unless you are rich. You were probably on a tight budget before the illness hit you. It will get tighter. So, your bargaining chips are mostly time-based. How will you schedule your time differently, beginning as soon as you submit the written offer? How will this restructuring of your time reflect your commitment to becoming the person you want to be?

Now, get to work on your self-inventory.

Warning: you will need help with this.

1. How much help will you need?
2. Where can you get this help?
3. Why do you think you will get it?

Chapter 5

How Long Will They Miss You?

You have probably heard this before. A man dies. Someone asks a friend of his: “How much did he leave behind?” The friend responds: “All of it!”

Wrong. I’ll get to this later.

We all leave something behind. I am leaving this little book. I am also leaving behind about 60 other books – some not so little. Authors are obsessive about leaving something behind. But we know that, with few exceptions, authors don’t change the world much. Yes, the Internet gives us hope. A book need never go out of print. Google may lead someone to a paragraph. The paragraph will grab some web surfer’s attention. This is all good for authors.

You are not an author. You could be. WordPress.com is free. But you have not spent your life writing. You probably won’t begin now, unless you get a really spectacular answer from God. So, what is your equivalent of a book that hardly anyone has ever read, and probably will never read?

What is your legacy so far?

A month after you die, who will remember you, other than close friends and family? A decade from now, will even they remember? How often?

Why should they?

What did you leave behind?

People leave behind children. They hope that, down through the generations, there will be a ripple effect. Yes, you were here. But hardly anyone will remember you.

Write down what you know about your great, great grandfather. What about his wife? This won't take long. I know this about my grandfather's father: he was a printer named Jacob. That's it. I know nothing about his wife. I know nothing about my mother's grandfather, let alone his wife.

The web will change this for some people. But just because you write your memoirs, and you post them on WordPress.com, this doesn't mean that anyone will read them in 50 years.

Yet you have left a legacy so far. You will leave even more, although not as much as you had planned before you heard this: "You're terminal."

What have you got to show for it?

What has anyone else got to show for it?

You have occupied space. You have consumed resources. You have produced something to pay for those resources. Soon, you will be leaving nothing behind.

Will anyone notice?

Why?

For the vast majority of people who have ever lived, they were not missed for long. But even more depressing, their death-imposed lack of output was not missed for long.

If hardly anyone will miss you after you're gone, just how important are you? If hardly anyone will miss your output after you're gone, just how important is it?

If you were given an additional 15 years of life, could you change this?

How?

There was a man in the Bible who faced up to this. He was a king. His name was Hezekiah. His story appears in the Book of Isaiah, chapter 38. I am not going to reprint the entire chapter here. But if any of this interests you, get a Bible, and read the whole chapter.

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, And said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I

have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city.

He heard the fateful words: “Set thine house in order.” He prayed. His prayer was answered. He is still remembered today. He will be remembered in a thousand years. His story is in a book that does not go out of print.

How about you? If you were given an extra 15 years, what could you do differently? Not *will* do differently – merely *could*.

Look at it this way. In 15 years, what will anyone remember about you? But if you were given an extra 15 years, what would people remember 15 years after that?

I am preparing you to make your offer.

This is all part of the inventory process. AA says to make a moral inventory. You should do this. But I am going beyond AA. Make an economic inventory: your legacy in terms of your last will and testament – or better yet, a trust. (Talk to your lawyer about this, but don’t make him your estate’s executor.) Make a social inventory. In terms of your relationships, what’s to miss? By whom? Why?

Then remember this: “If you don’t care who gets the credit, you can accomplish a great deal.”

Wait a minute! If you’re not remembered, because you gave others the credit, isn’t

this self-defeating? On the contrary, it is self-affirming. It is a new self. This new self makes a new affirmation: “I would rather leave behind a legacy that makes people’s lives better, yet be forgotten, than to leave behind something memorable but which accomplishes less, because I got the credit.”

But then who will remember?

The person on the other side of the coming negotiation. He has an exceptional memory – better than you may want to know.

Remember: we are talking about a stay of execution, not a pardon . . . at least so far.

The question, “What’s to miss?” raises another question, and far more significant: “By whom?”

Keep reading.

Chapter 6

A Written Offer

When you get married, you sign legal documents. When you buy a house, you sign legal documents. When you sign a life insurance policy, you sign a legal document. If you are wise, when you accept a job, you sign a written contract. You hope it's legal.

Today, your life is on the line. Are you willing to sign a contract to get a stay of execution? If not, why not?

The stakes are higher than getting married, buying a house, buying a life insurance policy, or getting a new job. The stakes are permanent. There is no second chance. There is no escape clause.

Maybe you think there is an escape clause. Your physician may be wrong. In stage five, dying people reach acceptance: no escape clause. You are in stage three. I am trying to help you avoid stage four: depression. For that matter, I am trying to help you avoid stage five.

Stage three is bargaining. *You are now negotiating for an escape clause.*

Are you looking for an escape clause in your escape clause? Don't. It may invalidate the escape clause. If you escape from your escape clause, so does God.

Remember what you are bargaining for: a stay of execution. You are not negotiating for a pardon. Pardons are not negotiable. They are granted.

I recommend that you think very carefully about your offer. I assume that you have been doing this. The best approach is to fill a sheet of lined paper with preliminary items for your list. College ruled, at least. Narrow ruled would be better. Maybe you can fill two sheets. It should be easy to fill a sheet. Be creative.

If I were doing this, I would use 3x5 note cards.

Other people might prefer to use a word processor. Or maybe a simple data base program.

The key is not the technology. The key is the list.

The hard part is not making a preliminary list. The hard part is drawing a line through each of the promises that you know you cannot possibly fulfill. But do that step in the procedure only after you have written down every item that you think God might regard as suitable for your list of token payments.

If you have trouble compiling the preliminary list, you had better go back to the earlier step: making a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself. You are not yet finished with that step. Then work on your economic inventory. Then work on your social inventory: relationships.

There is plenty to fill out a preliminary list. Start here: "What should I have done with my life?" This is the crucial preliminary step to answering this question: "What should I do with the rest of my life?" Right now, that will be a very short list. The clock is ticking. You are trying to arrange more time to make possible a longer list.

Or are you? Maybe you don't think of it this way. You are making a longer list to make possible more time. That is the structure of offer #1. It's better than nothing. It's better than stage two: shaking your symbolic fist at God for what has happened to you. But you can do better than offer #1.

The stakes are high. Keep this in mind. *The stakes are actually higher than you think.* I'll get to this point later.

Back to the preliminary list. Break it up into categories: (1) individuals to help, (2) groups to help, (3) controlling your tongue (cursing in the broadest sense), (4) loosening up your tongue (blessing in the broadest sense), (5) being more thankful *for*, (6) being more thankful *to*, (7) re-structuring your priorities, (8) better time management, (9) less TV. (Are you seeking a stay of execution in order to watch more TV?)

There may be other categories. Add them.

Leave plenty of space. Or buy plenty of cards.

When you are finished laying out the categories, start filling them in. If something seems reasonable as a worthwhile project, write it down.

You will find that you won't run out of ideas after the first hour. Your mind will get more creative.

Why should you keep at this? Because you need to recognize a crucial fact: you are capable of imagining lots of creative, worthwhile things you could do if you had another 15 years. Your legacy could be significantly different, if you only had enough extra time.

As long as you're in the negotiation stage, get serious about the amount of time you need. The word is *need*, not want. You are after a miracle. Make it a big one. If you need it, I mean.

When it's time to start cutting down the list, one by one, use this reason: "This would be worth doing, but I just don't have enough time."

You should have done this exercise at age 20.

With respect to any one of them, you could have done it if you had started earlier. You might not have achieved what you did achieve – the trade-off – but you could have done any of them. You probably could have done two or three of them. You should have done two or three of them.

This is no time for regret. You have enough regret as it is. This exercise is designed to show you *what you might have done*, if you had done a better job with goal-selection, time management, and a different attitude toward the uses to which you could have put your time so far. It is designed to drive home a point: you still could achieve a lot if you could get more time.

How much time do you need? To answer this, you must first answer this: *What do you intend to do with it if you get it?*

You must also answer this: *What will you **stop doing** in order to schedule time to do what you will be doing?*

Time is not free. To devote time to one thing, you cannot devote it to another.

There is a trade-off for time: time vs. time.

What will you give up? Figure this out now. More important for the offer, if you get a stay of execution, *what will you cut from your schedule in order to meet your new commitment?* Will you go back to your job? For how many hours a week? Will you put in overtime? For how many hours a week? In short, *how will you pay in time for your offer's performance of time?* Factor this into your answer before you cull the list.

There are no free lunches. There is no free time.

When you have finished the list, even if this takes several hours, you will be ready for the hard part: cutting the list down to your offer.

This will take longer than it took you to write the list. This will take reasons. Possible reasons include: (1) you don't have time to learn how, (2) you don't have the money, (3) you don't have the interest to finish, (4) you really are too old, (5) you would not know where to start, (6) you have never shown any skill in this area, (7) somebody else could do it better, (8) somebody else is already doing it better, (9) something else is really a lot more important for me to attempt. "And the list dwindles down to a precious few."

I recommend this one: volunteer for a hospice. It's better to volunteer for a hospice than to die in one.

The process of culling the list will help you to focus on what you really want to do with any stay of execution. You are saying this to yourself: "I am serious about making a

final offer.” This technique is known as the process of elimination. It will get more difficult as you come closer to the final offer.

What is this really about. You are looking for your calling. What do I mean by *calling*? This: *the most important thing you can do in which you would be most difficult to replace.*

You should have done this exercise at age 20.

I decided what my calling was at age 18. I am still working on it. I am getting close to completing it. I am age 73. Let me assure you, I have needed every year. This booklet is not part of my calling. It’s a side venture. I allow myself side ventures. But I keep plugging away at my calling. I do not allow myself to get sidetracked. If you are curious about what my calling is, go here:

<http://bit.ly/CallingSince1960>

I mention this, not to sidetrack you, but to remind you of what someone can accomplish if he identifies his calling early enough, and takes systematic steps to pursue it. This is what you will have to do.

Your offer must not be limited to your final list. It must also include a detailed plan of how you expect to complete it, given the years of health you are granted.

This is why you need stages in your plans. You must have milestones. If you get to

one milestone, you will proceed to the next stage. Each milestone must serve as a marker. Your work should be able to be picked up by someone else. With respect to your calling, this is your heir.

You may not know who this will be. You will not know until you are two or three milestones into your list.

There are lots of things you can and should do, in addition to your calling. I am writing this booklet as a side venture. But, as I have said, it is not my calling. My calling is central to my self-definition.

What I am saying is this: *your offer must include a supreme promise*. This will be the focus of your allocation of time, emotion, and spare money. This must be your northern star, your internal compass.

Its position at the top of your list says: “I should have done this earlier, but I will begin to do it now.”

Then write your offer.

Sign it.

Put it in a file where you will check back monthly to see whether you are still on track. If you get off track, change course. Get back on track.

Chapter 7

WHO ARE YOU DEALING WITH?

Any specialist in negotiating will tell you never to go into a negotiation without knowing who your opponent is. Above all, you must know what he wants out of the deal.

You can always offer more, but you must never offer less. If you offer less, this may kill the deal.

In this case, killing the deal means killing all future opportunities to make any further deals. Things will become non-negotiable.

So, let us begin with the basics. First, the person you are negotiating with has the power of life and death. If this were not the case, why would you be negotiating?

Second, anyone who possesses the power of life and death doesn't need you to make his life more fulfilling. This means that *you are bringing nothing crucial to the table*.

This places 100% of the burden on you to come up with a good offer.

This is not a normal negotiation. When the person on the other side of the table possesses the thing that you want more than anything else that is negotiable, and you have nothing that he needs, this narrows the range of negotiation.

What this means is this: *you are asking a huge favor*. This is more along the lines of begging than negotiating.

Do you deserve this favor? If so, put it in the written offer. What's that? You say that if you were to put that in the offer, it would probably kill the deal?

You are now coming to grips with the nature of the situation you are in.

Let me make it even plainer. *You are now coming to grips with the situation you have been in all your life.*

It's not that you only recently figured out that you are going to die. You have known this for most of your life, right? It is just that only recently have you come to grips with the situation. You are now in stage three of this realization.

Better late than never.

So, to reiterate: *you are bringing nothing to the table except a request.* The person on the other side of the table is in a position to grant your request. But if you have nothing that He needs, and He has exactly the thing that you need, then what kind of negotiation is this?

Let me make your situation clearer. I will help you see this for yourself. When people see things for themselves, they see far more clearly. This is sometimes called the shock of recognition.

You need a favor. It is a big favor. No one else is in a position to grant it to you. You are at the end of your rope. You need more rope. You do not deserve more rope. You do not deserve the favor.

What is the word that we use to describe a favor that someone does not deserve?

There is such a word. We use it from time to time. We rarely think of what it means.

Think hard. You are after a favor. The person who is in a position to grant it to you is under no obligation to grant it. You cannot possibly afford to buy it. You don't have enough money, and He doesn't need any more money, especially yours. So, what exactly are you after? Give me the word. Think hard.

The word is *grace*.

If the other person is out of grace, you are out of luck.

In this arrangement, there is no luck. There is only the silent ticking of your clock. You are 100% dependent on grace.

You always were.

This should be your moment of truth, your shock of recognition. Maybe it isn't, but it should be.

You did not get to where you are by making regular payments to some cosmic landlord. You are not running out of time because you missed several payments. You are not being evicted for nonpayment.

You were given grace. It was not an unlimited grant of undeserved favor. *It was a time-limited grant of undeserved favor.*

You are asking for an extension to time. You are therefore asking for a lengthening of your undeserved grant.

I want you to understand what is involved here. I want you to get your request. But I also want you to understand the nature of your request. You may get your request. You may not. But you really should understand the nature of your request. If you do, the outcome of your negotiations is more likely to be successful.

At this point, you may want to revise your list. But I do not think this is necessary. At this point, you need to decide on the structure of your offer, not the content.

Chapter 8

Presenting Your Offer

I now return to the structure of the offer. I think you have three ways to structure your offer.

Offer #1

God, I have come to the end of my rope. I should have come to you earlier, but better late than never, I always say. I don't want to die. I mean "die yet." Of course I'm going to die. I know that. I have always known that. But now you have my attention. I prefer to die later. So, here's the deal. If you will cure me of this disease, I promise to do the following: [present the list].

Offer #2

God, I have come to the end of my rope. I should have come to you earlier, but better late than never, I always say. I don't want to die. I mean "die yet." Of course I'm going to die. I know that. I have always known that. But now you have my attention. I prefer to die later. Here's the deal. I have work to do. I have good things that I want to leave behind. If I die soon, I

will not be able to finish any of these projects. I am hereby surrendering myself and my work to you. I will give you credit for all of it. It's your call.

[Present the list.]

Offer #3

God, it took me a while, but I finally get the picture. I have had a good life. Compared to how most people have lived in history, or live in a Chinese village today, I am rich. I have accomplished a lot. I never fully appreciated this before. Now that I am about to lose it, I see this far more clearly. Thank you for what I have been given so far. I now see that it has been your gift to me, and I never thanked you for it. I would like to show my appreciation in a token way. I have some things I should have done a long time ago. I am willing to start them. But I am almost out of time. If you would extend my life, I will start these projects. If you give me even more time, I will finish them. [Present the list.]

So, which one is it going to be? Which one do you feel best reflects your preset mental condition? Which one is really you? That is the one to make.

Don't sugar coat this. God knows your state of mind. The offer isn't for Him. It's for you. *The offer is for you to clarify your own thinking.* Think about the offer in terms of

what you honest-to-God feel.

Now, which offer are you content with? Stay of execution or no stay of execution, which offer says: “This is the best deal I’m willing to offer?”

This is the heart of your offer, not the list of sacrifices. The list of sacrifices was an exercise to prepare you for this. The list of sacrifices says, “This is what I’m willing to pay.” It lets you place a value on your stay of execution. You told yourself what an extension of your life is really worth to you. You needed to do this. Now that you have done this, you are ready to present the offer.

God does not need your sacrifice. Are you clear about this? It is a token payment. It says: “This is what I think you would like. It’s the best I can do.” It’s a real-world offer – or it had better be. If it’s not, re-write it. Sign it again. (You did sign it, didn’t you? You did not think I was speaking figuratively, I hope.)

Now you are at the crucial state. You must “gift-wrap” your offer. They say that you can’t judge a book by its cover. That rule does not apply to this situation. You can judge this offer by its cover. So can God.

Which offer is it going to be?

It might be a good idea to re-read all three of them.

I’ll wait. . . .

OK, it’s time. Make the presentation. You can make it out loud. You can make it silently. It doesn’t matter, although *out loud* has a nice ring to it. It’s kind of like a

marriage vow. The other party likes to hear it. But it's not necessary.

I'll wait. . . .

OK, it is over. It is now up to God to make the decision to grant your request.

But you're not done yet. With respect to the stay of execution, you're done. It's no longer in your hands. Your offer is signed, sealed, and delivered – lock, stock, and barrel.

There is now the question of your pardon.

I hope you didn't forget about the pardon.

I waited to go into detail about the terms of your pardon. I did this for a reason. If you're not sufficiently confident that God is paying attention to you, so that He might even grant you a stay of execution, then I don't think you are ready to hear about the pardon. First things first.

Keep reading.

Chapter 9

Your Pardon

I've got good news and bad news.

First, the bad news. You may not be granted a stay of execution. I assume you knew that already, but you need to be reminded. But whether He does or doesn't, you're still terminal. We all are. It's only a matter of time.

Then what's the good news? Even if you don't get your stay of execution, you can get a pardon.

You may ask: "A pardon for what?" I thought you'd never ask.

So did God.

The Apostle Paul, writing almost 2,000 years ago, summed it up in a letter he wrote to the church that was located in Rome. He wrote it in Greek, but the English of 1611 gets his ideas across quite well. He made two crucial points.

Point #1

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Point #2

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Death. All roads lead to death. But the New Testament teaches that there are two kinds of death. One kind is common. We call this biological death. The list in *Patch Adams* serves us well. The other kind is spiritual death. It is special. I call it special death, but only to distinguish it from common death. It is not universal, although it is more common than most people want to believe. The New Testament calls this the second death. The Apostle John wrote about this in the last book in the New Testament.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:13-15).

You don’t want to die a second time. Trust me on this.

You have heard about hell. You have heard wrong. Hell is God's down payment. You could even call it a token payment. It lasts only until the final judgment for everyone. Then things get really bad for people who had been in the holding area: hell. Hell is temporary. The lake of fire is the real deal. Forever.

Nevertheless, to get your attention on the lake of fire, the New Testament does talk about hell, for comparison's sake. Jesus talked about it. You can read about it in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 16, verses 19-31. I do not need to reproduce this here. As baseball manager Casey Stengel used to say, "You can look it up."

You have also heard about heaven. You have heard wrong. Heaven is also a down payment. It is also a holding area until the final judgment for everyone. Then comes the bodily resurrection. Those who are not dumped into the lake of fire go into the next phase of life: the new heaven and the new earth. It is described in the final two chapters of the Book of Revelation, the final book in the New Testament. I suggest that you read them.

We can think of this as the second life, mirroring the second death. There, things get better and better. Forever.

That's where you want to be. Trust me on this.

How do you get there? By means of a pardon. The Apostle John described the judicial basis of this pardon as follows:

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not

the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

Actually, John was recording the words of Jesus’ second-cousin, a man known in history as John the Baptist – a bitter pill to swallow for us Presbyterians.

Still unsure? Let me quote Paul again. This is also from his letter to Roman Christians.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:6-11).

Later in this letter, he added this, for clarification’s sake:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe

in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth
confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10).

This really is not difficult to understand. All men are under condemnation from day one. Women, too. They are under the negative sanction of biological death, what we can call the first death. They are also under the threat of the second death: the lake of fire. There is no escape from the first death. There is an escape from the second death. This is the good news. The New Testament has a word for this good news: the gospel. That is what “gospel” means: good news. It is very good news. For some.

To review: you’re terminal. You’re doubly terminal: first death and second death. You have had a wake-up call regarding the first death. You have read this far, so you have now had a wake-up call regarding the second death. You are going to stay terminal with respect to the first death. You need not stay terminal for the second death.

Here is more good news. The pardon has been granted. It has been signed, sealed, and delivered – lock, stock, and barrel. By God. But it is not a done deal. It requires another signature: yours.

Yes, I am speaking figuratively. But I really am speaking judicially.

You did not need to sign a written covenant document when you presented your request for a stay of execution, but it was a nice gesture if you printed it out and literally

signed it. Symbols are important. We live in terms of symbols. *Symbols provide reminders, and reminders strengthen us.*

I am now asking you to think about the pardon. It is sitting there, figuratively speaking, right in front of you. If you printed out your stay of execution request, I suggest adding an addendum to it. I mean this literally. In terms of the judicial status of your eternal condition, you can no longer avoid this procedure. But symbols are called for. I want you to pick up your pen and add one of three addendums. Sign it and date it.

Addendum #1

I accept my pardon on the terms offered. I acknowledge that Jesus Christ literally died for my sins. I am no longer under the condemnation of the second death I offer my eternal thanks.

Addendum #2

I do not believe that I need a pardon, because I am not under the threat of eternal condemnation.

Addendum #3

I really don't know whether there is a pardon, but I am willing to remain open for further enlightenment from God.

You don't really need to sign it and date it. The judicial authority of your position does not stand or fall on your signature. But I suggest that you do this as a symbol and as a reminder.

I want to make something clear. *You are not in a position to buy this pardon.* Also, you are not “upping the ante” with respect to your offer of the request for a stay of execution. The pardon is a gift of God, not an item on sale for high bidders. Paul wrote this to the church at Ephesus:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

You can perform good works. Your offer for a stay of execution included good works. These are token offers, not payment for services rendered by God. They are symbols. But once you acknowledge the pardon through confession of faith, you are volunteering for duty – eternal duty. The good works you perform in history are merely tokens of the good works you will surely perform in eternity.

Get your pen. Add the addendum. Sign it. Date it.

Then wait. You may not have to wait long.

Chapter 10

You CAN Take It With You!

Let's get back to the exchange. "How much did he leave behind?" "All of it!"

Jesus taught otherwise.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

This is a remarkable promise. To understand it, think of a retirement fund. You think I'm kidding. I'm not. A retirement fund has an amortization schedule. Amortization, as in *mort*: death. You know: mortality. The fund dies when you die.

But the pardon says you will not die the second death. This retirement fund applies to the first death. You build it up for collection, not in the second death, but in the second life. We call this the afterlife. This is marked by the first death.

What Jesus taught is easy to understand, but difficult for us to believe. We transfer assets from the first life to the second life. This is an annuity that pays off forever.

Maybe you bought an annuity. If so, your insurance company is officially sad to hear of your present condition, but the guys in the actuary department are chortling: “We told you so!” Your one consolation (I hope) is that you also bought a \$1,000,000 ten-year level-term life insurance policy no more than nine years ago, plus a few more months. While you are not rejoicing, you are quietly saying: “Gotcha!” Your spouse will thank you. Your kids will thank you. (If your lawyer is the executor of your estate, he will also thank you.)

The annuity that God offers is simple to understand: “pay now, collect later.” You may not have much time remaining to pay. But get started.

Note: I am writing this to those of you who accepted the pardon. To those of you who did not, and won’t, you must meet the terms of your stay of execution offer. Anything extra *may* buy you more time in this first life. It will buy you nothing in the second life. You have no second life.

Chapter 12

Avoiding Stage 4: Depression

If you have taken my advice so far regarding your stay of execution, you have laid the foundation for avoiding stage four.

If you made the presentation, you have taken the big step. This does not mean that there are no more steps to take. You may decide to keep searching for a cure. You never know. God may give you your stay of execution by means of a cure.

That happened to my wife in 1988. She had been suffering for two years from chronic fatigue syndrome. Back then, most physicians dismissed this as psychological. She was in constant pain. She was always exhausted, even after sleeping 16 hours. She would read a paragraph, and she forgot it immediately. If she drove over 15 miles an hour, she felt as though she was speeding. She had searched for relief in those pre-Google days. Nothing worked.

Then I spoke at a large Christian meeting in Jamaica. I asked the group of 1,300 people to pray for her. They did. When I returned home, I told her. Within a week, she spoke to the wife of a friend of mine. The wife had been cured by her endometriosis. She recommended that my wife go to a strange man with a strange machine. My wife was at the end of her rope. She did not think it would work, but I sent her. She was hooked up to the machine for three 8-hour sessions. All symptoms disappeared. They never returned.

I wrote about this for my subscribers. About a dozen went to him. Eleven were cured. Anyway, that's what I remember. The government later shut him down. He fled to England. He later died of old age. But not before he had cured James Coburn of his arthritic pain. He was able to go back into movies. I interviewed him on this. It was a great story. I have written about this here:

<http://bit.ly/CoburnCure>

I tell this story to make a point: my wife's cure was based on those prayers. But it was also based on her willingness to take the advice of the wife of my friend. The prayers were answered miraculously, but not autonomously. They were part of a procedure.

If you wrote down the stay of execution request and signed it, you now have legitimate hope of deliverance . . . for a time. You have taken a major step. It is not necessarily a final step, if you still have the strength to keep looking.

What if your offer is not accepted? You know this: you took the final step. There really was nothing more you could have done. You went the extra mile.

What is there to be depressed about that you did not know at age five? You're terminal. So, what else is new?

Once you signed that document, you moved to stage five: acceptance.

You have read the chapter on the pardon. Maybe you accepted it. You have now

overcome the threat that was hanging over you from day one. There is now nothing to be depressed about. The silent clock was going to keep on ticking until it stopped. It is going to stop. The first life is going to end. This is no longer a threat to you. Therefore, Paul wrote:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

For those who have not accepted a pardon, you have good reason to fear. I never said you would get rid of fear. I said I thought you could avoid depression. I think you will avoid it.

Why? Because depression overwhelms people who have no hope. You still have hope. Your clock is still ticking.

If you refuse to accept your pardon, that is a good reason to fear. It is not a good reason to be depressed. Depression is being overwhelmed by something you can do nothing about. You still have the option to do something about it. About what? Death. The second death – the real deal in the death department.

Should you worry? Yes. Should you be depressed? No.

You have moved to acceptance. It is now a question of what it is that you are willing to accept.

Note: you can add an addendum to your addendum for as long as the silent clock is still ticking.

Chapter 12

An Online Community of Terminal People

I have a website, as you know by now: www.GaryNorth.com. There, I have set up a forum for readers of this little book: **Stay of Execution**. It is available to you and others in your condition. Maybe you feel that you are alone. If others who have read this book want to participate, you will all not feel quite so alone. There is a technical problem, however. My website's software does not allow me to create a forum for non-members. So, I have created a special subscription offer: free for six months. That should do it, I think. By then, you should know, one way or the other.

My paid subscribers are not going to be upset that I am offering this to you. They would not want to change places with you in order to get a free six-month subscription. Trust me on this.

I don't want my critics to say that I am preying on the dying rather than praying for the dying. So, I will let you access everything on my site for free. The details are on a page that is not available to the general public:

<http://www.garynorth.com/public/14156.cfm>

Maybe you will unexpectedly get well. Then you can renew at the end of six

months for \$14.95 a month.

I would like to believe that this offer will become legendary – the most successful subscription offer in history. I want to think that hundreds of readers – no, thousands – will unexpectedly get well, and therefore will become subscribers for at least 15 years. I also hope I live long enough to fulfill this offer.

But, reasonably speaking, it's not going to happen – not because God does not grant stays of execution, but because so few people will ever hear about this little book, and not all of those who read it will believe me enough to test my theory by making a written offer to God to get a stay of execution.

I hope you have made your offer.

As for your pardon, it has been granted: signed, sealed and delivered. But it does go into effect until you accept it. In history. Not after.

For he saith, “I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Corinthians 6:2).

The clock is ticking. For a while.

Conclusion

We come now to the conclusion. In every life, there is always a conclusion. In all of the books I write, there is a conclusion.

You have not yet reached your conclusion. (Depending on when you read this, I may already have reached mine.) The clock is still ticking.

Now what?

If you did not accept your pardon, you have some serious thinking to do. I leave you to it.

If you accepted your pardon, you now need support. You have begun a journey. This phase of it may not last long. That depends on your stay of execution.

To support you in your journey, you need to join a church.

Which church? If a member of a church told you about this little book, ask that person about his church if it's a local church. That's the best place to begin.

If the person is not local, ask for advice anyway.

What is a good church like? Does it recommend a hospice program? Is there someone in the church who works with a hospice? What does the church recommend that a hospice volunteer tell hospice residents in their final days? Is there church training for hospice service?

What does the church preach about the second death? Probably not much. These

days, that is not a hot topic. (Sorry, I could not resist.) But at least find out what it has in its statement of faith.

It had better have an official statement of faith. If not, look for a different church. Also, just because it has one is no guarantee that the pastor adheres to it. Forewarned is forearmed.

Who does it say Jesus Christ is? What does it say that He accomplished, pardon-wise? What does it say about the legal foundation of this pardon? This issue is all about a legal declaration: “Guilty” vs. “Not guilty.”

After you spend some time in church, you may want to re-write your stay of execution offer. Write another addendum. You can always give more than you originally offered. Just don’t subtract.

This much is sure. If you join a church, more people will show up at your funeral.

Also, your heirs will be able to get help from church leaders who will keep them from being guilt-manipulated by a funeral director. No, you won’t need the best casket. Yes, cremation is cheaper than embalming. No, the funeral service won’t have to be held at the funeral home. The church is just fine. Better, in fact. Do your heirs even need a funeral home? Why? There are alternatives to funeral homes. Use Google to see what is available locally. Ask at a local hospice. In short, don’t pay retail.

Once there is no body to handle, funeral prices drop dramatically. As for me, cremation is fine. We cremated my son’s remains. That is good enough for me. No casket.

“Save a tree!” When it comes to saving money on funerals, I’m a green. But if you want a casket, start shopping online now. Don’t let your grief-stricken spouse pay retail to a funeral home. *Put this in your written instructions for your funeral.* Sign it. Do this today. You don’t have time for procrastination.

As a Protestant, let me recommend a low-cost Trappist casket. But don’t order it just yet. Wait for some word on your stay of execution offer.

If you have not read Jessica Mitford’s book, *The American Way of Death Revisited*, it’s time. I read the first edition over 50 years ago. It was recommended to me by a Canadian former embalmer, who later became a pastor. I took it to heart. You should, too. So should your spouse. Buy a used copy on Amazon. It will save your heirs thousands of dollars and a lot of needless grief. Order it here:

<http://bit.ly/MitfordAWOD>

Give your heirs guidance on what you want for your funeral. Be specific. Put this in writing. You can get good advice here:

<http://www.funeral-help.com>

There is another short book to read: *The Affordable Funeral: Going in Style, Not in*

Debt. It will save your heirs thousands of dollars, which can be put to far better uses than going into the bank account of a funeral home.

Do not pay for embalming unless the state requires it, and don't take the word of a funeral home agent in this matter. Have a closed-casket funeral.

Search online for a local Memorial Society or a chapter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance. Find out how inexpensive such services are before you put in writing what you really, truly want . . . for them, not you. Don't let them negotiate at the last minute. They will lose. They are up against professionals. Get the arrangements settled now. Put them in writing. Sign them. Have a witness sign them.

Ask yourself these questions:

Why do I need a graveside service? (It might rain.)

Why should anyone have to come anywhere the evening before?

Why have a funeral service in a funeral home?

Why shouldn't I write my own obituary – no sentimental fluff?

Why do I need a fancy headstone?

How small should my bronze plaque be (larger is more expensive)?

Does this plaque need an expensive base?

Why do I need a mausoleum (except as a real estate investment)?

Why isn't cremation good enough?

Why shouldn't I buy a nice cigar humidifier for \$80?

Why should my heirs pay \$900 for exactly the same box?

Why should they pay for a soloist to sing?

How many flowers do I need?

What are the cheapest flowers?

Why not have my body transferred to the county morgue?

Why pay for my remains to be sent to the church/chapel?

Why not have my body put in the casket at the morgue?

Why pay for more than two trips: (1) funeral service and (2) grave?

Why does it need to be at the funeral service, anyway?

What's wrong with an empty casket at the service?

Why not have a friend take it in his pickup to the morgue after the service?

Why not cut shipping fees to one trip: morgue to grave?

Will your friend drive your body in the casket to the grave? Cheap?

Are you a veteran? Have you joined the Veteran's Cremation and Burial Society?

There are funeral homes that offer 40% discounts to members.

Do you have a **funeral shopping agent** to run interference for you? Any trusted friend can do this. Let him know that his job is to negotiate whenever a service is

inescapable – and few are.

Read my article on funerals. I wrote it in 1978. It's an old PDF, but it's still readable.

<http://www.garynorth.com/Funerals.pdf>

Your funeral should not involve any debt, nor any regrets when the bills are submitted. Your heirs should not entertain this thought: “What were we thinking of?”

Here is my recommendation: “Have your heirs cry at your memorial service, not at the presentation of the bill.”

You must take this responsibility now. You owe this to your heirs.

If your wife is soon to be a widow, the two of you should read this book together: *The Widow's Handbook*, by Charlotte Foehner. You can buy a used copy on Amazon, cheap. Talk through the issues she raises.