

Hell's shadows fall over this woman even while she lives. How often have men and women entered "outer darkness" after pretending a life of faith in Christ? How many scores of them have rehearsed in hell these very words: "I have been wrong all my life; I have wasted my life"?

Perhaps, like so many, this woman assumed she would reconcile her estrangement from God prior to dying. But she did not count on the sinking depression that would make her numb to almost everything. She did not count on the effects of medicine on her cognitive abilities. She did not count on dying in her *ambition* before she dies in her *body*.

Or maybe she actually believes she is doing fine with God. Deception is like that. It is believing what is not true—and maybe believing it strongly. Perhaps she perceives that she needs nothing more, as the cousin expressed. Perhaps in all her emptiness she cannot feel enough desire any longer to even probe the question. Perhaps she rests on previous perceptions of her state before God, knowing that she doesn't have the mental ability to think it through again.

Could it be that she does recognize her problem with God, yet it irritates her to hear someone else say it? Maybe she knows what her cousin says is true, and yet, pride keeps her from admitting it openly.

Getting Through

Can you get through to such a person who lives in a cocoon of pride or deception? Is it possible to reach them?

It is possible. There is no statement in the Bible that shows us otherwise. Salvation is always a miracle of God. As was said about rich men entering the kingdom of God, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mk 10:27).

What is our part?

Probe into the life and beg for an honest admission of need.

Ask God to give you the way to have a deep, revealing discussion about what life is and has actually been like. One dear woman I knew admitted years and years of bitterness about intimate issues as she lay in the hospital room. It led to her conversion and a new sweetness as fruit of the change in her final days on earth. At the heart of it was the need to come to grips with a sin that had dominated her life.

Read the Scriptures aloud repeatedly

Though many will reject it, those who are open to hearing the Bible read show good promise of believing those words. Choose an appropriate gospel book or a fitting epistle to read aloud, always praying for an opening for the truth. Read often if possible.

Appeal as passionately as possible

Do not have the regret of neglecting the souls of your loved ones because they seem

resistant. Do you really wish to let your relative or friend die without hearing the gospel well and often? Invite them to place their confidence in



Christ and his words of promise to them. The gospel is powerful enough to change them, even at this late stage.

Continue until death

Don't stop loving and serving the words of life to your relative or friend. If God's word does not penetrate one day, it might the next. As long as it is possible, read the Bible aloud to him or her, praying sincerely for God to work. If he or she finally rejects Christ, it should not be because you have failed to make the issue plain.

My friend ended his letter with these instructive and true words. He has experienced himself the meaning of them.

When we stare death in the face, a Christian is basing his eternal future on words, mere words, but words, he believes and knows are handed down from God Himself, and are an exact manifest of the hereafter.

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Shadows of Hell: Fear and Emptiness Before Death

Jim Elliff

This poignant note came to a faithful friend of mine who is suffering from life-threatening cancer. It concerns a woman in the nursing home who has been a "good church-goer only." The note reads:

It is sad beyond words to watch mom's health failing and see her fear and anxiety or detached numbness as she faces each day. She wavers back and forth. It is all sad and full of despair. There is no longing for glory, no hope of future joy, nothing to live for and nothing to look forward to. It is a place of great darkness and despair. She believes firmly that she has all there is of God, and any message to the contrary irritates her. It would take incredible humility for anyone to admit, *"I have been wrong all my life; I have wasted my life."*



I feel sorry for folks in the nursing home because that is true for most of them. The female chaplain there is a nice-enough person, but I doubt very much that she knows the Lord. Mom's pastor from her church is a mail carrier during the week and a fill-in pastor on weekends, and again, a nice-enough fellow, but doesn't go deep at all. What a tragedy to have "spiritual leaders" who are lost and leading the flock around in meaningless circles with no fear of God.