



*The Journey of
Ministry: Insights
from a Life of Practice*
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Through Dying, We Learn to Live

Every human family, no matter how much it tries to avoid the subject and live in denial, has to face the issue of death. Sometimes it comes to an elderly person at the end of a fulfilled life, and the living can celebrate. Such funerals and memorial services can indeed be joyful, and even triumphant, occasions. At other times, when a baby, child or young person is taken, we are left in anguish and with unanswered questions.

This issue became very personal for us when Renee and I were expecting a new baby. All went well until the final weeks of the pregnancy, when the doctor realized that something was seriously wrong. The baby was no longer moving and positioning herself as she should. By the time Renee went into the hospital, she knew that the baby had died in her womb. She was placed in a ward full of expectant mothers with the knowledge that her baby would not enter this world alive. It was a time of drawing strength from the Lord, and she took great comfort from the psalms, underlining in the Bible she still uses today.

The hospital asked if we wanted to see our baby girl. We both held her briefly in our arms and named her Alison. For us that was an important moment of closure, but *closure* is not the right word. We were handing her back to the Lord for his safekeeping.

It is not only families that have to face death, but also the family of God. We need to live in anticipation of joining “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9).

If we haven’t learned to die in the *midst* of life, it will be all the harder at the *end* of our life. In stating this, I’m not speaking of near-death experiences or of surviving life-threatening diseases. Rather I’m speaking of any time in life when it seems that we have hit a wall in terms of our future. Our hopes have been dashed, and a seeming abyss lies before us.

In Renee’s and my journey—both as individuals and as a couple—each new chapter has come as a surprise to us. And each entailed a “dying.”

—Adapted from chapter three, “Dying: A Fruitful Way to Live”



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Eddie Gibbs is senior professor in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and a senior adviser to the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts. Before his partial retirement in 2008, Gibbs occupied Fuller’s Robert Munger Chair of Evangelism and the Donald A. McGavran Chair of Church Growth. His seminars on evangelism, church growth and leadership have been held in countries around the world.

Eddie has dedicated the last seven years of his forty years of ministry to studying the challenges facing the church in the North and West as they have seen the collapse of Christendom. His research resulted in the publication of three popular books whose influence has been widely recognized: *ChurchNext*, *LeadershipNext* and *Emerging Churches* (coauthored with Ryan Bolger). In 2001 *ChurchNext* was named a *Christianity Today* Book of the Year, and in 2005 *LeadershipNext* was a finalist in *Outreach* magazine’s list of best resources of the year.

In his newest release, *The Journey of Ministry*, Eddie gets personal. He invites the reader into his own journey, one that demonstrates how effective ministry is a matter of walking slowly with the family of God, overcoming hurdles and facing challenges together. He explains how the networking nature of the early church offers helpful models for connecting in our fragmented technological age. Linking fresh biblical exposition with our contemporary realities, Eddie gives practical advice for welcoming people into the family and helping them live out God’s intentions for them.

“We learn a lot about Eddie in this fine book. But it’s not because he simply focuses on himself. Eddie is, for one thing, too much of a family person and colleague for that; his journey of ministry is one shared with many others. But he is also a global Christian, and he has always been very enthusiastic about telling people about what God is doing in regions beyond our individual comfort zones. There are many engaging personal reflections in this book, and they point beyond the person who is telling the stories to the much larger narrative of God’s creating and redeeming purposes in the world.”

—From the foreword by Richard Mouw, president,
Fuller Theological Seminary