

# Lessons on Dying

## Essential Books to Understand Life's Last Moments

### ***How We Die* – Sherwin B. Nuland**

In this award-winning book, Dr. Nuland frankly describes the dying process for six different diseases, including heart disease and cancer, the two most common killers. Dr. Nuland, a professor of surgery at Yale, says a lack of understanding about the dying process is a modern phenomenon. In the past, generations lived together in the same home, where children were born and grandparents died, so death was something everybody witnessed throughout their lives. Today, most people live separately – often several states away – from older relatives, and many people still die in hospital wards or nursing homes, out of sight. “We try to hide death”, Dr. Nuland says. “There’s a good reason we don’t know much about it.”

### ***Final Gifts* – Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley**

This book is aimed at helping the reader understand the “special awareness, needs and communications of the dying.” It was written by two hospice nurses who have been at the bedside of numerous ill patients and their families. It describes “nearing death awareness,” the sometimes puzzling changes that occur as a person nears death. In the final days and hours of life, dying people often make statements or gestures that don’t make sense and seem to indicate confusion. But this book makes a strong case that we need to listen closely to the dying because they are far more aware and in control of the dying process.

### ***Motherless Daughters* – Hope Edelman**

Although this book is primarily about women who lost their mothers during childhood or in their teens, it resonates with women who lose their mother at any age. It captures not only the incalculable feeling of loss you experience when a mother dies, but also the sense of isolation and permanence that comes from death. This is a sad book, but it is also therapeutic and oddly reassuring to know that the pain of losing your mother never really goes away.

### ***What’s Heaven* – Maria Shriver**

Ms. Shriver wrote this book based on conversations she had with her then six-year old daughter when the child’s great-grandmother died.

### ***When Dinosaurs Die* – Laurie Krasny and Marc Brown**

This book explains different customs and beliefs about death as well as the confusion and fear the death of a loved one causes.