

Preparing for Your Shortest Day

by Rev. David Rash, Stewardship Matters of Virginia LLC

How long is a day? 24 hours—1,440 minutes—86,400 seconds. But what about the day in your life that will not have 24 hours—1,440 minutes—86,400 seconds? What day will that be? The day your heart stops beating, the day you die. Making spiritual preparation for that day is essential, more important than anything else.

But there is another preparation to be made. Those who advocate for Alzheimer's research have labeled June 21, the Summer Solstice, as The Longest Day (www.act.als.org). I am advocating for December 21, the Winter Solstice, as The Shortest Day*, with an appeal to make preparations for your day with less than 24 hours.

Pastors know the pain of watching families in deep, immediate grief, trying to decide what loved ones wanted for funeral plans, the disposition of the body, or the distribution of family heirlooms and estates. But there is a way to make it much easier.

Living wills, durable power of attorney for healthcare, finances, writing of clear instructions to the family (for example, cremation or burial), where memorial contributions should be directed, and other numerous details is hugely helpful to those left to make these agonizing decisions.

But the larger question is, how will we use our resources to bless that which is important to us? Bequests can make a huge difference for your faith community, for the arts and humanities, for education, for children, for the poor. This is one part of what is known as planned giving. You have a unique opportunity to make an enduring contribution and leave a legacy for which many will be grateful for years to come. Don't miss it! Seek help in writing it so it is clear.

Caring.com reports that 60% of adults do not have a will. It is essential to have a valid, updated will that reflects your wishes. Maybe yours needs revision. If you don't have a last will and testament, make the appointment. Get it done.

When John D. Rockefeller died (1937) his accountant was reportedly asked, "How much of his estate did he leave behind?" The answer, "All of it." Psalm 49:17 says (edited), "When we die, we will carry nothing away. Our wealth will not go after us."

Statistics tell us that only eight out of one-hundred Christians remember to include their church in their will. It is not because the church has no need, but because churches rarely educate, inform, or invite their members to make this generous gift. I make it a practice to urge all Christians to give a tithe of their estates to their church. Imagine what a wonderful source of support this can be for years after you have died. Have you made such provision?

I know it is high Christmas time, but use this "shortest day" to take the first step: make an appointment with yourself, your family, your attorney, to address what is to happen when your day has less than 24 hours. Write down all that is important to you that your family needs to know. Use your estate to provide for others. Practice generosity even in death.

Make your shortest day one of your best days by being intentional about planning for end-of-life issues.

*indebted to Charles Schultz, Crescendo Interactive, for conceiving The Shortest Day.

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