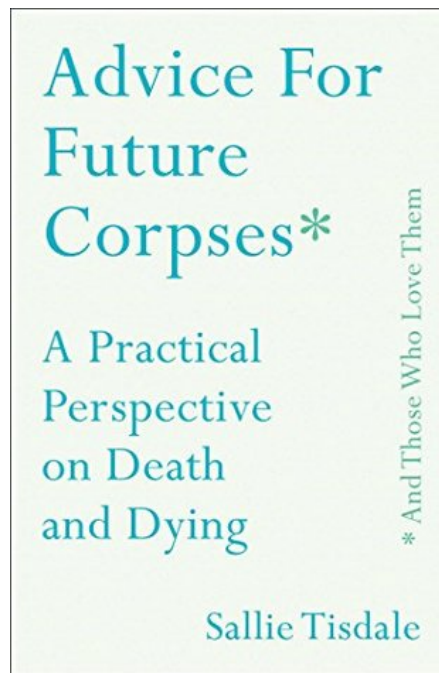




Advice for Future Corpses (and Those Who Love Them): A Practical Perspective on Death and Dying

Sallie Tisdale

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“In its loving, fierce specificity, this book on how to die is also a blessedly saccharine-free guide for how to live.” —*The New York Times*

We Are All Future Corpses

Former NEA fellow and Pushcart Prize-winning writer Sallie Tisdale offers a lyrical, thought-provoking, yet practical perspective on death and dying in *Advice for Future Corpses (and Those Who Love Them)*. Informed by her many years working as a nurse, with more than a decade in palliative care, Tisdale provides a frank, direct, and compassionate meditation on the inevitable.

From the sublime (the faint sound of Mozart as you take your last breath) to the ridiculous (lessons on how to close the sagging jaw of a corpse), Tisdale leads the reader through the peaks and troughs of death with a calm, wise, and humorous hand. *Advice for Future Corpses* is more than a how-to manual or a spiritual bible: it is a graceful compilation of honest and intimate anecdotes based on the deaths Tisdale has witnessed in her work and life, as well as stories from cultures, traditions, and literature around the world.

Tisdale explores all the heartbreaking, beautiful, terrifying, confusing, absurd, and even joyful experiences that accompany the work of dying, including:

A Good Death: What does it mean to die “a good death”? Can there be more than one kind of good death? What can I do to make my death, or the deaths of my loved ones, good?

Communication: What to say and not to say, what to ask, and when, from the dying, loved ones, doctors, and more.

Last Months, Weeks, Days, and Hours: What you might expect, physically and emotionally, including the limitations, freedoms, pain, and joy of this unique time.

Bodies: What happens to a body after death? What options are available to me after my death, and how do I choose—and make sure my wishes are followed?

Grief: “Grief is the story that must be told over and over...Grief is the breath after the last one.”

Beautifully written and compulsively readable, *Advice for Future Corpses* offers the resources and reassurance that we all need for planning the ends of our lives, and is essential reading for future corpses everywhere.

Advice for Future Corpses (and Those Who Love Them): A Practical Perspective on Death and Dying Details

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Sienna says

I loved every word of this book. I listened to the audio version. I kept writing down phrases & I knew very quickly that I'll need to listen to this book again. I'll need to have a copy of the ebook so I can highlight a hundred perfect insights & so I can take advantage of the thorough & specific advice in the two appendices. The advice is for us, future corpses, but almost more so for us, visitors. The choices are simpler for us as corpses than as helpers. It's not entirely new, but it's beautifully put together. I recommend it for everybody - we all need to know how to face death, & how to communicate with those we love who are facing it. It is explicit... she describes the various things that happen to the body after death, including tissue donation, blow flies, & fire... but with wonder... don't forget to notice the collateral beauty. I'm going to be working with this book for the rest of my life.

Marcus Choo says

Close your eyes. Feel the grass. The silk sheets. The skin of the loving hand. Hear the long-held note. Dance a little. Smell the bread. Imagine that.

As somebody who has spent a not insignificant amount of their time in a dissection room opening up cadavers, I probably am more aware of mortality (at least on a biological sense, in being aware of the horrifying internal clockwork that keeps us alive) than the average person. I think a lot about death but always as an abstraction, at a remove - but of course *at some point, most of us shift from realizing that sooner or later some future self will die to realizing that this very self, me, will die*. Tisdale spends a lot of time hammering this point home, stripping away the cognitive dissonance that protects us from having to come to terms with this fact.

However, she very frequently veers into existential melodrama - *I am dead, too; the me that lived in the other world, the world where she was, died*, she opines at one point. There are also many, many pages of wistful, oh-look-how-the-cherry-blossoms-fall style reflections on the nature of mortality. Tisdale is a Zen Buddhist and her philosophy deeply informs the narrative: *An old Buddhist meditation is simply this: I am of the nature to grow old. I am of the nature to be sick. I am of the nature to die.*

I learned quite a lot about how to deal with the dying, and the bereaved - a lot of the rituals we put in place are for the sake of the living rather than the comfort of the dying. I learned a bit about what questions to ask (and more importantly, what questions not to ask). I learned about attitudes towards death and mourning in different cultures around the world, especially in India and Japan. I learned about new ways I could dispose of my body when I die - resomation (dissolution in an alkaline substance) and promession (being frozen into crystalline shards). I learned new words to add to my death vocabulary - algor mortis (the falling body temperature after death) and livor mortis (the discoloration of the body, as red blood cells break down and stain the skin).

Ultimately, an excellent read in terms of the information content, but gets repetitive when the author waxes lyrical, which she does, often and luxuriantly.

and he was gone out of his body as easily as a leaf drops from the tree in autumn, slowly twisting and falling to the ground

Ellyn Lem says

I have read other books by Sallie Tisdale (really enjoyed her one on food) and was anticipating this brand-new one on death, especially after recently finishing Barbara Ehrenrich's latest on the same subject. It was different from what I expected tho' with such a provocative title, who could be sure of what to expect? She draws a lot of insight on death from your years as a nurse and seeing death up close with the patients she cared for. Tisdale also practices Buddhism and draws upon many of what she has learned from Eastern philosophy on death, which, for me, were not the most stimulating parts of the text. I liked best when she talked about the people close to her who died and left her with deep complex feelings to explore like her very best friend Carol and a veteran who her husband sponsored in AA and ended up living with them toward the end. For those who are squeamish around death, this might not be the book for you. A lot about what happens to corpses after death in great detail (e.g., we are talking breeding maggots!!) and new options for disposing of bodies since there is limited cemetery space in most countries--including "renting" space and having another body take its place after a while. Dark but real topics...maybe could have been ordered in a clearer way to illuminate the separateness of some issues. Still, worth reading for me.

Jaime says

Quite simply, one of the best books I have read regarding dying, death, and grief. And I've read a lot.

Stephanie says

A must read for everyone young and old. Dying is a part of living, and Sallie Tisdale tells us how to do it best. This is not a grim depressing book at all. Tisdale interjects humor, but she mostly educates. I learned so much from her. I wish I had been exposed to it sooner.

Carol says

Took a little while to get into but wow am I glad I read this. Near the end, I was often in tears -- from open hearted news, not sadness. A lovely look at death and grief using poetry, science, Buddhist principles and anthropology. So, a book about life.

Ken says

Everything you always wanted to know about dying, mostly. Interesting, yes. And a great tonic for those of you into denial and delay (you get "D" for effort). It suffered a bit from some repetition, yes. And the part about Tisdale being Buddhist didn't get as much attention as I wished.

But the cool part came in the final chapters, especially about what happens to your body in the final hours, and what happens to your body once it has "crossed" (and gee, I wish there were an exclusive chapter on euphemisms), and what you must and must not do when you are a caretaker helping a loved one during her/his final months/weeks/days/hours/minutes.

It's good to know, at least, that you do not need a funeral home's services. And that you can fire doctors (who work for you, remember). If you want to be cremated, your corpse can go direct (say, to a crematorium) without passing GO (er, STOP) and paying \$250 (er, \$2,5000). And there's a look at the newfangled latest (composting yourself) among other ways to dispense with bodies as well as a glance at what various cultures do with them (though it's not exhaustive).

The best part are the appendices. Checklists, questions, key info for your loved ones and mostly you. Think about it. Fill it out. It's your life. It's your death. Which is part of your life, so think about your poor body. The legacy, more an abstraction, is a lifetime in the making, but the body is real and needs to be dealt with the way YOU want it dealt with. One hopes.

George says

I liked this highly practical book. I had hoped for a full chapter on suicide, as opposed to an appendix on assisted death, but there are other books that pick up on that theme.

Tracey Johnson says

Unsure how to remove Star Rating when accidentally touched. Dad is reading it.

stacy says

i really liked this book. as a middle-aged future corpse and lover of (some) future corpses, i thought it was well done. i especially liked the chapter titled 'communication' and found the appendices helpful.

i recommend to everyone. i also recommend not reading the 'bodies' chapter while eating.

Diane Barnes says

I admit the title is what drew me to this book. I continued reading because it is an unsentimental, non-religious, practical look at death and dying. As the author points out, birth and death are the two experiences that every living creature shares, that no one can practice for, and that are the big mysteries of existence.

In case you think this is a depressing book, it is not. Realistic advice on how to control what you can, and make dying easier for yourself and others.

Sam Mace says

This book is a great read if you are helping another person through the perfect, near-painless, at peace-with-the-world beautiful death. Or if you want reassurance that death is usually like that. If instead you are by the side of a person fearing death, suffering through some painful last weeks, not at peace with the world or with regrets, this book is unhelpful at best, insufferable at worst. Tilsdale devotes very few words to those sort of dying experiences, brushing over them as exceptions to the rule. By the end, I was gritting my teeth at the swooning descriptions of indian funeral pyres and human ashes.

This book was helpful to me in only one sense: it assured me that no one should die in pain if they don't want to and it gave me the strength to fight the medical bureaucracy to get my loved one the strong pain meds she needed and wanted. The book also includes some helpful appendices on planning for your own death-- medical directives, etc. Hence the 2 stars.

But for this sort of practical advice, just reach out to a hospice. Hospice staff see difficult deaths all the time and can offer advice and perspective that Tilsdale, in her Zen Buddhist bubble, will not.

Kathleen Flynn says

A heartfelt yet practical book. I recommend it for anyone planning to die, now or in the future.

Noer says

This book is a meditation on the one topic nobody wants to think or talk about, especially not in the early stages of their lives: death. It's going to happen to all of us. The question is: are you prepared? Tisdale's answer is that you can prepare yourself, but not in the way you might think.

Through a series of personal stories she illustrates different ways of handling these types of situations. She portrays how one, without any preparation, instinctively responds. Especially when in the presence of a dead body. It confronts us with Ernest Becker's concept of the denial of death.

Tisdale describes how 'travelling' is the most found metaphor dying people exhibit in their behaviour. This is done through describing the stories of people who are months away, to weeks away to eventually mere days away from dying.

If you're looking for a list of practical tips you won't find it. This is not to say that there isn't any good advice found, it's just scattered along her stream of consciousness writing: be respectful to people who are dying, accept the situation, let emotions be and don't exaggerate them, don't promise the person anything or tell them any lies just to make them feel better about their situation, recognise that dying is an ongoing process of loss and that it can even be boring. Maybe the most important for ourselves: plan for your ideal death and beyond. Have a will and already decide what you want happen to your body after you leave it.

Mainlinebooker says

A wonderfully philosophical and yet tongue in cheek reflection on what needs to be done at the end of life. Wonderfully practical, this treatise written by a palliative care nurse and Zen Buddhist, provides authentic information of how to handle a body when it has deceased and explains the person's final symptoms in his/her waning days and what it means. It also is a joyous affirmation on how to live. As someone who volunteers with hospice patients, I found it wonderfully informative and would be useful for programs dedicated to training volunteers or simply to anyone who wants to be open and make their own independent decisions about their final hours. Not for the faint of heart, but those who are full of heart.
