

## Story 29

# Preferences for After-Death Body Disposition

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*Thinking about it while you are still alive*

## The Story

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Now that I have reached eighty, news of people departing from this world reaches me often. Four years ago, even my younger brother — seven years my junior — went to God's kingdom.

Living with thirty years of diabetes and a history of heart surgery, I find genuine gratitude in the fact that neighbors and organizations still occasionally ask for my help.

The question of what to do with the body that housed my life in this world — how to recycle it, or at minimum, not to harm the world with it — is one I have carried through many years of living across different cultures.

## My Ranked Preferences

**1. Organ Donation** *If I die in a state where my organs are still usable, I hope that through transplantation others can extend their lives with better quality. I have informed my doctors, family, and the relevant government agencies that any usable organ should be harvested.*

**2. Body Donation for Medical Education** *If I cannot directly help another person's life, I would donate my body to a medical school for education and research. I have learned, however, that bodies from which major organs have already been donated are typically declined by medical schools as unsuitable for educational use.*

**3. Natural Burial** *To be buried in a natural woodland setting without chemical treatment, using only easily biodegradable materials, and to become fertilizer as quickly as possible.*

**4. Alkaline Hydrolysis** *A process of gradual decomposition in a non-toxic liquid, returning the body to a natural state.*

**5. Cremation** *My last preference.*

*I am not sharing my ranked preferences because I believe they are best, or because I want others to follow them. My invitation is simply this: think about it while you are alive, and share your wishes with your family and medical team.*

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## Small Group Discussion Guide

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This story addresses death directly — but calmly. The core of the discussion is that talking about death helps us see life more clearly. Discomfort is a natural response, and the facilitator’s task is to hold space without pressure.

### — Church Community —

#### Young Adults (20s–35) | Church Group

##### Opening (5 min)

- Why does talking about death feel awkward or uncomfortable? What is behind that?

##### Discussion (20 min)

- Has thinking about death ever changed how you live? What happened?
- Dr. Park says he wants to ‘become fertilizer.’ How might that image connect to a faith in resurrection?
- What do you think about organ donation? Have you come to any conclusions, including from a faith perspective?
- If “how you want to die” and “how you want to live” are connected — how are they connected?

##### Scripture (10 min)

**John 12:24** — *“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

- How does Dr. Park’s image of ‘becoming fertilizer’ connect with this verse?

##### Application (5 min)

- After you are gone: what trace would you want to have left in a neighbor’s life?

#### Adults (36–60) | Church Group

##### Opening (5 min)

- Have you talked with your family about your own death? If not, what is in the way?

##### Discussion (20 min)

- In thinking about priorities for the time that remains: what role can thinking about death play?
- How are “how you want to die” and “how you want to live” connected for you?
- If you shared this story with your family — what conversation might become possible? What would be difficult?

##### Scripture (10 min)

**Psalms 90:12** — *“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*

- ‘Numbering our days’ — how does that connect to a conscious awareness of death? And to living wisely?

#### **Application (5 min)**

- This month: have one conversation with your family about death — yours, or theirs, or both.

### **Seniors (60+) | Church Group**

#### **Opening (5 min)**

- Is there a way you have seen someone prepare for death that left an impression on you?

#### **Discussion (20 min)**

- Is there something about your own death that you want to communicate to your family?
- “What trace would you want to leave in a neighbor’s life” — how would you answer that question now?
- Is there something you want to put in order before you die?

#### **Scripture (10 min)**

**| 2 Timothy 4:7** — *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

- What would ‘finishing the race’ look like for you? What would that mean?

#### **Application (5 min)**

- What is the one thing from today’s story that stays with you most?

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## **— General Community —**

### **Young Adults (20s–35) | Community Group**

#### **Getting In (5 min)**

- How might thinking about death change how you live now?

#### **Discussion (20 min)**

- What do you think about organ donation or body donation? Have you made any decisions?
- Have you thought about how you want to die? Does thinking about that change how you want to live?
- The idea of ‘a death that doesn’t harm the environment’ — how does that land for you?

#### **Going Further (10 min)**

- Cultures that treat death as a taboo versus cultures that speak about it openly — which do you think is healthier? Why?

#### **One Step (5 min)**

- This month: have this conversation with a family member or someone close to you.

## Adults (36–60) | Community Group

### Getting In (5 min)

- Have you talked with your family about your own death? What was that conversation like?

### Discussion (20 min)

- If preparing for death and living well are connected — how do you think they connect?
- Have you thought about how you want to be remembered? Does that affect the choices you make now?

### Going Further (10 min)

- Why is talking about death uncomfortable? Is that discomfort healthy, or not?

### One Step (5 min)

- What from today's story is most striking? Say it in one sentence.

## Seniors (60+) | Community Group

### Getting In (5 min)

- If preparing for death and living well are connected — how has that connection appeared in your own life?

### Discussion (20 min)

- What trace do you most want to leave behind right now?
- If you shared this story with a family member or close friend — what conversation might follow?

### One Step (5 min)

- What from today's story stays with you most?

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## Facilitator's Guide

### The Heart of This Story

Talking about death helps us see life more clearly. Thinking about “how I want to die” leads us back to “how I want to live.” This story does not teach a method. It extends an invitation: think about it while you are alive, and share your wishes with those who need to know.

#### What This Story Is Really About

- ① The value of speaking about death openly rather than avoiding it
- ② How I want to die → How I want to live
- ③ The body as a final gift to neighbors — a resource, not just a remainder

### Where This Story Sits in the Series

This story forms a quiet trilogy with Story 34 (What Difference Does One Person's Death Make?) and Story 35 (How About Thinking About It While You're Alive?). Story 29 is the most concrete — it addresses the body itself, and asks us to think practically. Reading them in order: 29 (body) → 35 (way of living) → 34 (legacy) traces a natural arc.

## How to Begin

- ✓ “Why does talking about death feel awkward? What is behind that discomfort?” — start here. Naming the discomfort first makes more honest sharing possible.
- ✓ Alternative opener for groups where death feels especially difficult: “Has there ever been a time when thinking about the end of your life clarified what actually matters? What happened?”

## Three Risks to Watch For

- ⚠ **Risk 1: A participant is clearly uncomfortable with the topic** Do not push.

*Why it matters:* Discomfort is a valid response. Forcing the conversation closes the room.

*Redirect:* “What came up for you when you read this? — Discomfort is a completely valid response, and worth naming.”

- ⚠ **Risk 2: The discussion becomes a debate about which method is best** This misses the story's invitation.

*Why it matters:* Dr. Park is explicit that he is not promoting his preferences. The question is not method but willingness to think and share.

*Redirect:* “Rather than which method is right — why is it important to think about this while you're still alive, and to tell the people around you?”

- ⚠ **Risk 3: Someone advocates strongly for their own preference** The story explicitly guards against this.

*Why it matters:* Dr. Park says clearly that he is not sharing his ranking as a model for others.

*Redirect:* “Dr. Park is not saying his way is best. His invitation is simply: think about it, and tell the people who need to know. What does that invitation ask of you?”

## Notes for Specific Groups

**Seniors (60+):** This is the age group where the story lands most directly. Some in the room may have already thought this through. Create space for those stories to be shared without pressure.

**Middle-aged adults:** Many in this group have experienced the death of a parent. That experience can open the conversation in a personal and immediate way.

**Young adults:** The framing is not ‘this is too soon to think about’ but ‘now is the best time to think about it, before you have to.’ That reframe can open genuine curiosity.

**Immigrant and multicultural groups:** Death rituals vary widely across cultures. Creating space for people to share how death is (or is not) talked about in their culture of origin can open rich conversation.

## Closing the Session

✓ “After you are gone: what trace would you want to leave in a neighbor’s life?” — close with this.

*The Author’s Invitation: “I am not sharing my ranked preferences because I believe they are best, or because I want others to follow them. My invitation is simply this: think about it while you are alive, and share your wishes with your family and medical team.”*