

Coping with fear while facing the Coronavirus



St. Mary's
Virtual
Adult
Forum
(VAF)

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Stone Harbor, New Jersey

Chapter Nineteen “I’m Not Ready To Die”

July 30, 2020

Here is the format for our VAF:

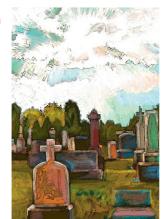
1. Read this week’s chapter from Adam Hamilton’s book *Unafraid*.
2. Consider the questions about the current chapter included on this handout.
3. You are invited to email me [k-gorman@Comcast.net] your responses to any or all of the questions posed. I will soon announce a deadline for submitting your responses. If you do not want your name mentioned in the responses, let me know and I will cite: “anonymous.” The next handout will offer questions on the next chapter plus your responses to this chapter.

Our bishops are describing churches as “schools for discipleship.” It is an apt phrase. If that is so, then disciples need opportunities to engage in learning about their faith. It is all about *faith seeking understanding*.

That is where you come in because at this moment: our school is in session.

Here is a sort of summary of this chapter:

We’re almost at the end of this VAF series based on Adam Hamilton’s book, “Unafraid.” Adam [I’m sure he won’t mind being on a first name basis] was aware that a great many of his parishioners at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City were living in fear. Fear was having an effect on their lives, a damaging effect. He wanted to help, and the result was this book and our virtual discussions. It wasn’t just one fear; it was an impressive list of fears from crime and terrorism to failure and loneliness, to fear of missing out and financial security . . . coming to a penultimate conclusion with the most decisive fear... the final one - death. He starts with a quote, a humorous one, from Woody Allen. But in what followed, he’s [pardon the expression] dead serious. I usually give a summary at this point. Not this week. The pages of chapter 19 embody [or, out of the body... as you will come to understand] what is called *tmi* [a.k.a., too much information]. So, this week, when it comes to a summary...you’re on your own.



Here is what's in this VAF Handout:

- 1.) A Non-Summary of "I'm Not Ready To Die".
[Handout, p.1]
- 2.) Table of Contents and Quotes.
[Handout, pp.2-3]
- 3.) The Denial of Death.
[Handout, p.3, Question #1]
- 4.) Funeral Service – Death and Afterlife.
[Handout, pp.3-4, Question #2]
- 5.) Immortal Soul...No!
[Handout, pp.4-5, Question #3]
- 6.) What's Heaven Like?
[Handout, p.5, Question #4]
- 7.) Participants' Responses.
[Handout, pp. 6-18]
- 8.) *In the News...* is taking a week off!
- 9.) Update: This Week's Information
[Handout, p.19]
- 10.) Next VAF Series Book Suggestions
[Handout, p.20-21]

Attachments:

- A.) Burial Service [from: *The Book of Common Prayer*].
- B.) What Theologians Have to Say About An Immortal Soul.

Below are a few quotes from this week's chapter:

Death is a regular part of my ministry as a pastor... [p.208]

Some try not to think about death – a strategy of denial... [p.209]

...what happens to us when we die... [p.210]

...there is more to human beings than our material life... [p.210]

...words used by New Testament authors to describe the human being variously as spirit, mind, soul, heart, as well as body...inner nature.... [p.211]

How is it that our essential self continues when the brain, which seems to serve as our hard drive and central processing unit, no longer lives? [p.212]

...will continue to exist, albeit in an imperishable (upgrade) body... [p.213]

...eternal life...a relatively minor theme...how to live now... [p.214]

...he [Jesus] says that he himself will come for us when we die. [p.215]

...God's response to our fear of death is the death and resurrection of Christ. [p.216]

Heaven, or the age to come, is portrayed as a great feast, a party, with the finest wines and foods, where sorrow, grief, and pain are no more. [p.218]

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[Believing] doesn't mean we have no fear, only that we're not controlled by fear. [p.219]

The hope of the resurrection has not taken away the difficulty of their journey, but it does provide them comfort and courage in the midst of it. [p.221]

Based on our reading of this chapter and the above quotes what follows on the next couple of pages are a few discussion ideas and some questions.

"The denial of death" is a phrase from Ernest Becker and the title of his famous book, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1974. Becker's book focused on how we human beings develop strategies to fend off awareness of our mortality and vulnerability and to escape into the feeling that we're immortal.

Much of his book deals with psychoanalysis and psychology. Almost fifty years later, advances in medical therapies and technological innovation have led to a widening of these "death denying" strategies in our culture.

Adam Hamilton called our attention to all of this when he wrote about the "strategy of denial". [p.209]

I would argue that another way we deny death is by soft-peddling it. Unfortunately, Adam does it right above his own phrase where he writes: "As we ponder our own passing..." Did you catch that? We use all kinds of euphemisms for death....like "passing."

So, Question #1 is:

- How many euphemisms for death can you come up with?
[If you need some help, look at the obituary section of any newspaper.]

All we need to do is say the word "funeral" and within microseconds, we have an image in our mind of what a funeral looks like. No matter where it's held, a funeral is a structured ceremony, with a beginning, middle and end.

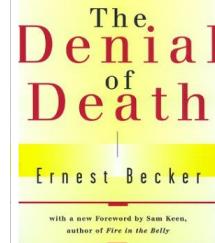
However, there is a difference in the type of service we are talking about. At a funeral service the body is present as a focal point of the service. At a memorial service the body is not present. Usually, a framed portrait or an urn [or both] serve as the focal point.

In the Episcopal Church, whether at a funeral or memorial service, the funeral liturgy is the relatively the same. There are options, choices that can be made [e.g., the readings, who will offer the homily; and there is no casket Commendation at a memorial service], but generally, the service will follow one of two rites in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

My interest here is to relate to the chapter under discussion. On the a pdf attachment in this week's VAF Handout is a copy of a funeral/memorial service from *The Book of Common Prayer*. [Burial Service: Rite Two, pp. 491-500]

(Continued on page 4)

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE
"It puts together what others have torn to pieces and rendered useless. It is one of those rare masterpieces that will stimulate your thoughts, your interested curiosity, and yet not bore your soul." —ELIZABETH KERKEL ROSS, M.D., author of *On Death and Dying*



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I would like you to read through the Burial Service and then answer the following questions.

Question #2:

- A. What beliefs about death and the afterlife are expressed or implied?
- B. What scriptures can be used? What do they express? In what ways are they a comfort?
- C. If you were in the family or a friend of the deceased, how would you respond to this liturgy?

What happens to us after we die? Adam

Hamilton asked that question. [p.210]

Did you know approximately one hundred thousand people search on Google each month for the answer to that question? Obviously, death provides us all with a compelling mystery, and many people search for an answer.



Adam Hamilton cites some answers to what happens to us when we die: some folks believe in the permanence of death and others profess reincarnation. Then he says "...for others there is a promise of a form of afterlife." [p.210] What "form of afterlife" could that be?

One form of afterlife that has come to my attention again and again during my ministry often sounds like this: "I'm going to pray for my friend's departed soul."

According to a Harris poll 64% of Americans believe the survival of their soul after death. [Those were the results of The Harris Poll of 2,250 adults surveyed online between November 13 and 18, 2013.]

Politicians and celebrities make frequent comments about souls and the afterlife. People across the social, economic, and educational spectrum regularly modify their behavior and make decisions based on the view that there is an afterlife and that they must act to protect the fate of their souls. In short, the belief in an immortal soul is enormously popular.

To the surprise of some of the parishioners I have had the pleasure to talk to, Christianity does not teach that we have an immortal soul. That, instead, is an old Greek idea, one that from time to time has weaseled its way into Christian thinking. Not only does Christianity not teach this idea, it refutes it.

There are many ramifications to this ill-conceived notion of such a soul. I only have a little space and time, so I am going to focus on what several authorities tell us. And then, I will leave it up to you to respond.

Whenever this subject has arisen – and, as I said, during my ministry it has happened countless times – I've tried to explain, but I don't think I won any one over. The notion of the immortal soul is just too popular and too deeply embedded.

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On the other attachment I have cited what a number of eminent theologians have said about the idea of an “immortal soul.” Their arguments are cogent. Here are a few words from each of them as a preview: a negative assertion; there is no “no zone”; unfortunate; gracious goodness; defect; no spirit-soul; reject; light bulb; little support; dangerous lie; dualism.

Please read the attachment, it’s a kind of synopsis of their thinking. After you have read what the theologians have said, I would appreciate your honesty in answering the following questions.

Question #3:

- A. Is the notion of an “immortal soul” new to you? If it is not new, where did you learn the idea of an “immortal soul”?
- B. Have any of the mentioned theologians’ points of view [cited on the attachment] helped you to better understand the idea of the immortal soul? If so, who and what did you find helpful? If not, the next question will help you to explain.
- C. Do you still believe in an immortal soul? If so why or why not?

I probably have exceeded the time

that I should expect from you on this chapter.

My last question requires only one or at the most two sentences [that is the limit, two sentences!] as an answer.

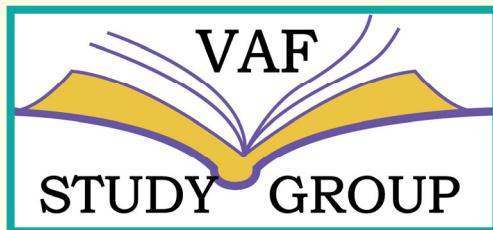
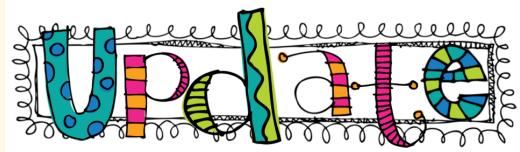
For most Christians, spending eternity in heaven is the coveted reward for a life of faith and good works here on earth.

Adam Hamilton wrote: *Heaven, or the age to come, is portrayed as a great feast, a party, with the finest wines and foods, where sorrow, grief and death are no more.* [p. 218]

Question #4:

- What do you hope heaven will be like? Or, to ask it in just a slightly different way, how would you describe heaven? [Remember one and no more than two sentences.]





Hamilton's book

Unaafraid

Tentative dates for emailing Handouts

AUGUST 6

Chapter twenty

"Living With Fear, Yet Unaafraid"

August 2020

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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
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Marion Myers is not among this week's contributors. Yesterday [Wednesday, July 29] she had a laser procedure called "Yag" to correct a cataract issue. This week the procedure was performed on one eye; next week she hopes to have the other eye corrected. When asked what the term "Yag" stands for, she said *she had no idea but it sounds impressive*. Can't you just hear her say that!

Ken





Next Study Series

Given the range of interest in the topics that are coming under consideration, I have had to slightly revise the schedule for our choosing the name of the next study series.

On the chart on page 21 you will find the suggestions for our next study series that I have received so far. [Thanks to all who have sent in their choices.]

Next Tuesday [August 4] I will send to everyone a complete list of all the submitted suggestions.

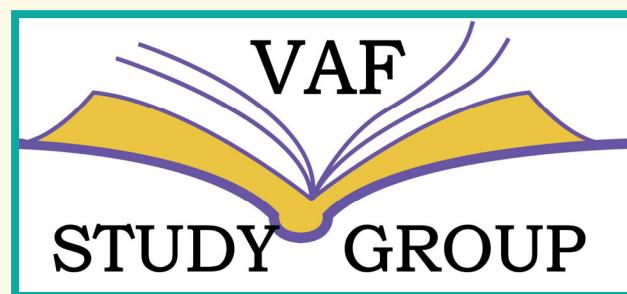
I'm going to ask that you choose one [only one] of the suggestions from either my original list [July 28] or from the Tuesday [August 4] list. That will be your final choice.

**After consulting the complete list,
please email me your one final choice
by Thursday, August 6th.**

I am hoping there will be a clear winner. Unless you want to contest this, I will go with the highest vote getter.

On the VAF Handout on August 6th I will announce the next study series and how we will proceed.

Ken





Next Study Series Suggestions

VAFer	Author	Book Title
Sue Dowling	Richard Rohr	<i>Falling Upward</i>
Sue Dowling	Richard Rohr	<i>Universal Christ</i>
Sue Dowling	Richard Rohr	<i>The Divine Dance</i>
Sue Dowling	Walter Brueggemann	<i>The Heart of the Hebrew Bible</i>
Sue Dowling	Walter Brueggemann	<i>The Unsettling God</i>
Sandy Harmon-Weiss	Adam Hamilton	<i>Christianity and World Religions</i>
Bill and Janice	Ted Voorhees Caren Goldman	<i>Across the Threshold into the Questions</i>
Marion Myers	Adam Hamilton	<i>Christianity and World Religions</i>
Cynthia and Lou	First choice Goldman/Voorhees	<i>Across the Threshold into the Questions</i>
Cynthia and Lou	Second Choice Matt Rawle	<i>The Faith of a Mockingbird</i>
Kate Rodriquez	C.S. Lewis	<i>The Screwtape Letters</i>
Kate Rodriquez	Adam Hamilton	<i>Christianity and World Religions</i>
Kate Rodriquez	Ted Voorhees Caren Goldman	<i>Across the Threshold into the Questions</i>

