The Five Stages of Dying
Elizabeth Kübler-Ross

In recent years a great deal of research has been done with the dying. Terminal patients have been interviewed and analyzed in an attempt to better understand the dying process. Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross is a well-known investigator in the field of dying. Though not a Christian, Dr. Kübler-Ross can help us understand and relate to the dying. In her book, *On Death and Dying*, she outlines five stages of dying. These are stages a person may go through after he is told he has a terminal illness and that, in all likelihood, death is just around the corner. Not all terminal patients go through all five stages. Nor is there always a clear progression from one stage to the next. Some may go back and forth between stages. Others may be in several stages at once. And, as we will see, a Christian’s faith has a profound effect on how he or she deals with death. The five stages are as follows:

1. **Denial and Isolation**—This usually occurs shortly after the person is told he has a terminal illness, although this denial may continue to the end. The person feels there must be some mistake. The doctor must have misread the X-ray, or the files must have been mixed up. This denial may lead the patient to consult with other doctors, hoping the initial diagnosis was wrong. As the patient’s health deteriorates, denial becomes more difficult. Denial may be the body’s way of coping with a traumatic experience. It can act as a defense mechanism and ease the person through the initial shock. However, prolonged denial is cause for concern.

2. **Anger**—When a person is no longer able to say, “No, it’s not me!” he may begin asking, “Why me?” This may cause him to lash out in anger at family, friends, doctors, nurses, and God. Even a Christian may say things, which shock those around him and lead them to question his faith. This is where patience is needed. The dying person may say some shocking things. While we don’t want to encourage or condone his anger, we don’t want to overreact to it either. If we put ourselves in his place, we will better understand his feelings of anger.

3. **Bargaining**—At this stage the question shifts from “Why me?” to “Why now?” As it becomes more difficult to deny his approaching death, the person seeks to postpone it by striking a bargain, often with God. He promises to go to church every Sunday, to live a good life, to spend more time with his family, if only the Lord will extend his life. At this stage a person can be susceptible to new treatments and miracle cures. He is willing to try almost anything with the hope of being cured.

4. **Depression**—When it becomes evident that death is near, the person often sinks into depression. During this time the patient will be grieving for what he has already lost (e.g., health, mobility) and is about to lose (i.e., friends, family). It is commonly a period of silence and withdrawal as the dying patient tries to separate himself from all he has known and loved. Kübler-Ross refers to this depression as ‘preparatory grief’ because it allows a person to prepare for death by letting go of his attachments in life. It may be depressing to visit people who are depressed. Yet they need our support. Often we don’t have to say much. Just being there and being attentive listeners will be an encouragement.

5. **Acceptance**—Eventually a person may resign himself to his impending death. He once again enjoys the company of people and is able to speak openly about his situation. He works at getting his house in order and may even anticipate his approaching death. Don’t confuse acceptance with giving up on life. We have to distinguish between the person who is accepting and preparing for his future death from the one who has lost the will to live. The former demonstrates faith; the latter, despair.

---

The five stages of the Kübler-Ross stage model are the best-known description of the emotional and psychological responses that many people experience when faced with a life-threatening illness or life-changing situation. The stages don't only apply to death but any life-changing event for which a loss is deeply felt, such as a divorce, the loss of a job, or the loss of a home. The Coping Process. A dying person may watch TV and see people laughing and dancing—a cruel reminder that he can't walk anymore, let alone dance. In the book "On Death and Dying," Kübler-Ross astutely describes this anger: "He will raise his voice, he will make demands, he will complain and ask to be given attention, perhaps as the last loud cry, 'I am alive, don't forget that. You can hear my voice. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described five stages of grief, popularly referred to as DABDA. They include: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. The Five Stages of Grief. An Examination of the Kubler-Ross Model. Article by: Christina Gregory, PhD. Jump to: Denial Anger Bargaining Depression Acceptance Symptoms Treatment. Grief Model Background. Throughout life, we experience many instances of grief. Grief can be caused by situations, relationships, or even substance abuse. Children may grieve a divorce, a wife may grieve the death of her husband, a teenager might grieve the ending of a relationship, or you might have received terminal medical news and are grieving your pending death. Additionally, these stages do not necessarily represent the healthiest pattern for all individuals under all circumstances. Kübler-Ross and others also have noted that people whose loved ones are dying may progress through the same five stages as the dying person. An individual who is not facing an immediate death has more time to adjust to the idea. In fact, dying can be a time of increased personal growth. The life review, or process of reminiscing, can help people examine the significance of their lives and prepare for death by making changes and finishing uncompleted tasks. Many dying indi