*Facing Death* *and Finding Hope* by Christine Longaker (NY:Doubleday, and London: Century, 1997) pgs.37-157.

1) **Understanding and transforming suffering.** Basically this means coming to an acceptance of thevarious problems, difficulties and painful experiences which are an inevitable part of life, and learning to cope with them. If we can learn to cope with the smaller sufferings that we encounter as we go through life, we will be better able to cope with the bigger sufferings that we will face when we die.

***We can ask ourselves: how do I react when problems,* *physical or mental, happen to me? Is my way* *of reacting healthy and satisfying, or could it be improved? What are some ways I can learn to cope better with problems?***

2) **Making a connection, healing relationships and** **letting go.** This task refers to our relationships with others, particularly family and friends. The main points here are to learn to communicate honestly, compassionately and unselfishly, and to resolve any unresolved problems we may have with others.

***Think about your relationships with your family,* *friends, people you work with, etc. Are there any* *unresolved problems? How can you start working towards* *resolving these?***

3) **Preparing spiritually for death.** Christine writes: “Every religious tradition emphasizes that to prepare spiritually for death it is vital that we establish right now a daily spiritual practice, a practice so deeply ingrained that it becomes part of our flesh and bones, our reflexive response to every situation in life, including our experiences of suffering.”

***Check: try to imagine yourself at the time of* *death—what thoughts and feelings would come up* *in your mind at that time? Are there any spiritual* *ideas or practices you have learned or experienced* *that would give you comfort and peace at that time?***

4) **Finding meaning in life.** Many of us go through life without a clear idea as to what is the purpose and meaning of our existence. This lack of clarity can become a problem as we become older and closer to death because we become less capable and more dependent upon others. So it is important to explore such questions as

***“What is the purpose* *of my life? Why am I here? What is important* *and not important***

**Task #1: Ask For Forgiveness**

We've all done things in our lives that have hurt those we love, either intentionally or unintentionally. We all carry wounds with us that family and friends have inflicted on us and we've all been the inflicter of wounds on those we love. The most important healing at the end of life isn't physical healing, but rather the healing of those emotional wounds.

Asking for forgiveness isn't easy, especially if we feel that we were misunderstood or justified in our actions. But regardless of how you feel about your rift, asking for forgiveness can be a freeing experience and can prepare your relationship for the rest of the work that needs to be done.

**Task #2: Offer Forgiveness**

This is another difficult tasks for many of us to complete. Offering forgiveness to someone who we feel hasn't earned it is extremely hard. But it's important to know that forgiving someone we love isn't excusing that person's behavior. Forgiveness is ultimately a gift we give ourselves; when we forgive, our spirit is set free of anger and resentment.

In addition to forgiving others, it's equally as important to forgive ourselves. You have undoubtedly done things you're not proud of. All of us have done things that we regret, we've made serious mistakes, and we all harbor shameful secrets. We are imperfect humans! But we are often harder on ourselves than others. Even if a friend or family member has granted you forgiveness, you might still find it difficult to forgive yourself. But forgiving yourself is the ultimate act of self-kindness, allowing you to find self-acceptance and love.

**Task #3: Offer Heartfelt Thanks**

We all have an innate need to express gratitude and feel appreciated. Many of us mistakenly believe that we don't actually have to say the words "thank you" out loud. We assume our loved ones know how thankful we are for all they have done for us. The truth is, often our loved ones really *don't* know how much we appreciate them.

Offering gratitude for the acts of kindness others have extended to you is quick and easy. It takes little time and effort to say "thank you," yet it can have a tremendous impact on completing important relationships. You can find something to be thankful for in every relationship in your life.

**Task #4: Offer Sentiments of Love**

Uh oh. Now we're getting mushy and sentimental. Before you skip over this task thinking it's too "feminine" or "touchy-feely," stop for a moment and think of those relationships that matter to you most. Can you recognize feelings of love for each of these people? Although it may differ from person to person, love for others is the most natural and important of human emotions. But saying the words "I love you" can be incredibly difficult for many people to say.

In what ways can you get creative in expressing your love?

**Task #5: Say Goodbye**

We've all heard touching stories of people who go to incredible lengths to say meaningful goodbyes - the mother who bought and wrapped presents for her daughter to open on every birthday and her wedding day; the child who wrote his parents a book of poems; the father who made a video diary for his children chronically his life and professing his love for them. All goodbyes don't need to be this elaborate. Once you've made it through the first four tasks, all that's left to do is recognize the precious impermanence of life and enjoy the presence of those you love.

Saying goodbye is painful but it doesn't have to be tragic. If you've completed your most important relationships by doing tasks 1-4, saying goodbye can be a bitter-sweet way to remind those you love how fleeting life is. It can be a wonderful way to remember to live life to the fullest and focus on the things that matter most - the relationships with those