

# John Carroll On Death

## Facing Death

This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds. To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance. A lifetime is a flash of lightening in the sky. Rushing by, like a torrent down a steep mountain.....Buddha

Americans think death is optional. People who do everything right die, and people who do everything wrong die. Death is neither a reward nor a punishment. It is true that each of us can do things that will improve our chances of living longer but that is at base just another form of gambling, like knowing not to hit on 18 in blackjack. There are many flaws in the health care system, but one of them is not its failure to prevent death. Indeed, it could be argued that the illusion that death is preventable is at the heart of many of the excesses of the health care system.

What would you do to live a year longer? For many people, these are not theoretical questions. Would you lose 60 pounds? Would you take terrible debilitating poisons to ensure that extra year? Would you bribe someone to push yourself to the front of the organ donor line? These are ethical questions, not medical ones. What would you do? Death is not a tragedy. The specific circumstances of a specific death may be tragic. Survivors may feel pain, loss. But I refuse to believe that each life ends in tragedy. And I know that each life ends in death. We don't think about death very well. We think about avoiding it a lot, but that seems foolish. It can't be avoided.

Looking young doesn't help. Doing everything right doesn't help. Suppose you could live forever, neither more nor less pain-free than you are now, neither more nor less wealthy or happy or wise. Would you do it? Would you opt for that second hundred years? Maybe we are already living long enough. Maybe that's part of the plan.

I am persuaded that only gratitude helps.