

GUIDE
ME
SAFELY
HOME,
LORD

*meditations of hope
near the end of life*

MICHAEL MERCER



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twentythirdpublications.com

TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS

1 Montauk Avenue, Suite 200, New London, CT 06320

(860) 437-3012 » (800) 321-0411

www.twentythirdrdpublications.com

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INTRODUCTION

The Irish use the phrase, "Slán abhaile," meaning "Safe home," to say goodbye to someone who is traveling home. It is a way of wishing a friend a good journey and a safe arrival.

The "journey home" may serve as a metaphor for one's final days of life. Whatever paths your life has taken, you have now turned a corner and find yourself near where God has prepared a place for you. Soon you will open the gate, amble up the walk, open the door, and find yourself home.

Consider this little book my way of saying to you, "Safe home."

People usually call me "Chaplain Mike." In my daily work I serve as a hospice chaplain. I meet and visit with people almost every day who have turned that corner and find that their home is in sight. In this book, I have tried to give you some things to think about as you walk the final portion of your journey.

Here are a week's worth of meditations for you to consider. If you are able, I hope you will read them yourself, ponder them, and turn them into prayers that help you experience God's presence. If you are unable to read, I hope that a loved one who is near can read them to you so that the words will wash over you and bring you peace.

Each word carries my wish for you: *Slán abhaile*—*Safe home*.

✱ *Chaplain Mike*

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Safe Home contains readings for seven days. They are designed to encourage you to have peaceful thoughts as you draw near the close of your life. They raise gentle questions as well, so that you may consider how to resolve some potential matters of unfinished business.

Feel free to read all or some of them, in any order you choose. The goal is not to get through all the material, but to focus on what will help bring you comfort.

I hope you will be able to read these meditations for yourself. If you can, perhaps you would then like to discuss them with a loved one, chaplain, minister, or caregiver.

You might find it preferable to have someone read these meditations aloud to you, especially if you find it hard to read at this time. Again, this might give you an opportunity for fruitful discussion with someone about what these thoughts say to you.

Note to a caregiver: Even if a dying person is unresponsive, it can still be valuable to read these thoughts at his or her bedside. We cannot be certain exactly what people in this condition can hear and process, but we do know that the very sound of your voice reading devotional material can be soothing and helpful.

If you are a family member or friend, some of these thoughts may help you realize things you need to say or do to help *you* get ready for your loved one's death, as well. I wish you peace and encouragement as you accompany your loved one home.

~~~~~ Day One ~~~~~

# L I F E

*And this is the promise that he made us:  
eternal life. » 1 JOHN 2:25*

All life is God's gift. It is God's greatest gift. One day, by God's providence and through the natural processes of reproduction, God breathed and you became alive.

Along with life, God gave you many other gifts: a personality, talents, unique physical features, people to love and care for you, teach you, befriend you, guide you, and walk with you through life. God provided you with a world to explore, lessons to learn, skills to develop, and experiences to remember. You've found pleasures to savor, as well as strength to make it through hard and pain-

ful times. God gave you work to do and relationships to treasure.

The gifts God gave in your life are unique to you. With them, you have written a life story no one else can tell. As you think back, what are some of the most memorable moments in your life? Which ones make you smile and feel grateful?

In Psalm 23, the psalmist thought back on his life and remembered God's shepherding love.

The LORD is my shepherd,  
there is nothing I lack.

In green pastures you let me graze;  
to safe waters you lead me;  
you restore my strength.

You guide me along the right path  
for the sake of your name.

Even when I walk through a dark valley,  
I fear no harm for you are at my side;  
your rod and staff give me  
courage.

You set a table before me  
as my enemies watch;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Only goodness and love will pursue me  
all the days of my life;  
I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
for years to come.

Provision. Redemption. Guidance. Courage. Joy. Mercy. Hope. These are some of life's gifts that God has also granted you. He continues to give them to you this very moment.

There has never been a day when God, the good Shepherd, has not been with you. He is with you today. He will be with you tomorrow. He will be with you, with his gift of life, forever.

**PRAYER**

*My God, you who have been my shepherd all the days of my life, guide me safely home. Feed me with the promise of everlasting life. Hold me close when shadows*

*threaten to shake my confidence in you.  
Fill me with your goodness and love every  
day of my life and beyond. Amen.*

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## FAITH

*But I trust in you, LORD; I say,  
“You are my God.” My times are in  
your hands. » PSALM 31:15-16*

**P**icture in your mind an infant child who has just finished nursing at her mother's breast. She is quiet, content. Not only is her belly full, but her spirit is at rest as she lies safe and warm, snuggled up against the one who loves her more than any other.

Before God, we are all children. But this is not always easy for us to see. When we grow up and become adults, we gain some measure of control over our lives. This gives us the illusion that we are “independent” and can make do with our own strength and re-

sources. We gain a bit of success in life. We take care of ourselves and our families. We help our friends. We overcome adversity. We set goals and reach them, make plans and complete them, and we celebrate our achievements. We humans have a great capacity to make things happen in this world.

However, none of us lives and accomplishes anything alone. Each human achievement happens because a complex web of relationships and circumstances makes it possible. And behind and in them all is the power of God, who gives us breath and life and strength each moment. To the Israelites who were tempted to say, "It is my own power and the strength of my own hand that has obtained for me this wealth," Moses said: "Remember then, it is the LORD, your God, who gives you the power to acquire wealth." By faith, we remember the Source of our strength.

King David's name is linked with Psalm 131. David is praised in the Bible as a man of great exploits, but he also knew that the