

From Egypt Lately Come*Thomas Kelly (1769–1855)*

From Egypt lately come,
Where death and darkness reign,
We seek our new, our better Home,
Where we our rest shall gain.
Alleluia! We are on our way to God!

To Canaan's sacred bound
We hast with songs of joy,
Where peace and liberty are found,
And sweets that never cloy.
Alleluia! We are on our way to God!

There sin and sorrow cease,
And every conflict's o'er;
There we shall dwell in endless peace,
And never hunger more.
Alleluia! We are on our way to God!

There, in celestial strains,
Enraptured myriads sing;
There love in every bosom reigns,
For God Himself is King.
Alleluia! We are on our way to God!

We soon shall join the throng,
Their pleasures we shall share,
And sing the everlasting song,
With all the ransomed there.
Alleluia! We are on our way to God!

How sweet the prospect is!
It cheers the pilgrim's breast!
We're journeying through the wilderness,
But soon shall gain our rest!
Alleluia! We are on our way to God!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***A Long Goodbye: Part Two***Don Odens*

My wife's casket was before me as I stood at the pulpit to present a tribute and the funeral sermon for the love of my life on July 18, 2018. Later, people asked how I could do that. The answer is a combination of God's grace, long pastoral experience, and a desire to honor Gloria. A long road led to her departure from this world into eternity, giving us time for *a long goodbye*. I did not have to deal with the shock of an unexpected death. The long goodbye began with a diagnosis of polycystic kidney disease (PKD) in 1983 and extended through surgeries to remove her native kidneys and transplant a donor organ. When the transplant failed in 2011, Gloria began a regimen of hemodialysis, spending three half-days each week connected to a dialysis machine.

Gloria's health deteriorated significantly in the last months of 2016. Her nephrologist helped us switch to peritoneal dialysis (PD) at home, believing it would be gentler than hemodialysis. A catheter was implanted surgically and I received training to administer PD. However, PD generated its own problems. In addition the catheter failed after only three months. Gloria returned to the hemodialysis clinic three days per week.

2017 brought numerous trips to the Emergency Room, nine hospitalizations, and five surgeries. I left a position on the faculty of Central Seminary to care for Gloria full-time. The "senior moments" about which we joked for a couple of years became serious as her memory declined. She became more and more somnolent. Occasionally, she became minimally responsive or even completely unresponsive. Expert physicians were unable to discover the cause. Several said, "Mrs. Odens, your case is very complex!" Eventually, dementia was added to her list of diagnoses. Our "long goodbye" now included diminished memory, difficulty in processing complex ideas, and decreased ability to communicate. The gregarious, vital, talkative woman I married now became quite withdrawn.

2018 brought continued decline in Gloria's energy and an increase in discomfort. She was somnolent in the day time. Her primary care physician became deeply concerned about the deterioration in her health and spoke with me several times about adopting a plan for the end of her life.



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We ate a late lunch on June 5. After eating, we sat at the table and talked. Her words were halting, but she expressed herself clearly and her thoughts were connected. At one point she said, "I don't know if I can live in our house." I asked what she meant. Her answer made it clear that she was contemplating death. We engaged in an extended conversation about death and eternity for believers in Jesus Christ, discussing John 14:1-6 and 11:25-26. Gloria asked how death occurs and if it was something she could do. I explained from Psalm 139:16 that God has determined the number of days in our lives. She concluded that she would have to wait for God to take her, and then asked if it is something we could do together! I asked if she was certain that she possessed eternal life. She replied, "Absolutely!" As our conversation ended, she said, "I just want to go to heaven."

Our daughter and I communicated with in-home hospice providers. To this point our focus had been on extending her life by drawing on the best medical care available. Now, it was becoming evident that Gloria had little energy left. Dialysis sessions exhausted her completely and she became more resistant to keeping her appointments. Following conversations with her primary care physician I determined that we would begin hospice care, but only if Gloria refused to continue doing dialysis or was not capable of going to dialysis.

That day came on July 2, 2018. Gloria was unresponsive and unable to keep her dialysis appointment. After twelve hours, I called the hospice provider and initiated hospice care. Gloria awakened that evening. The next morning, I asked her what she would choose for her future, presenting two options: (1) to go to heaven to be with Jesus in a few days, or (2) to continue dialysis. She replied, "To be with Jesus!" We continued the in-home hospice care, perhaps the most difficult decision I have ever made.

Dialysis patients who stop treatment typically pass away on days six, seven, or eight. Gloria lived to day fourteen! Those were extremely difficult days for her, but they also provided some sweet times. I returned to our bedroom with her medications at 7:00 a.m. on day twelve and said, "Good morning." She whispered, "Good morning." I asked, "Are you still my girlfriend?" She whispered, "Your girlfriend!" I said, "I love you." She responded, "I love you." She did not have enough energy to talk the rest of the day. On day thirteen, I replayed that scenario. Gloria could not whisper a response, but she mouthed "Good morning," and "Girlfriend," and "I love you." Then, after a pause, she whispered, "I love you, I love you, I love you!" and smiled broadly. Those were her last words to me.

Her last night was extremely difficult as Gloria struggled to breathe. Through the years of our marriage, she asked me several times to promise that I would join her in her hospital bed when she was dying. I made it a point to be there. I was awake most of the night but dozed occasionally. I awakened at 5:00 a.m. to hear her breathing with extreme difficulty. Taking

her hands in mine I asked God to take her into His presence and bring the struggle to an end. Apparently, I dozed again, because something startled me awake. Gloria was not struggling to breathe in that moment. I feared that she had passed away as I slept. Then, she took her last breath...and entered the glory of God's presence. The long goodbye was complete.

I miss her deeply, but God has brought comfort and strength through His Word, the presence of our children, and the support of uncounted numbers of friends.



This essay is by Don Odens, Professor of Homiletics and Expository Preaching at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
