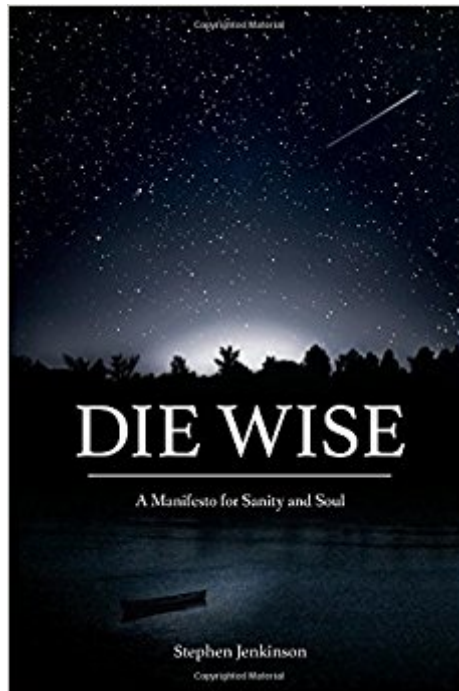


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Die Wise: A Manifesto For Sanity And Soul



Synopsis

Die Wise does not offer seven steps for coping with death. It does not suggest ways to make dying easier. It pours no honey to make the medicine go down. Instead, with lyrical prose, deep wisdom, and stories from his two decades of working with dying people and their families, Stephen Jenkinson places death at the center of the page and asks us to behold it in all its painful beauty. *Die Wise* teaches the skills of dying, skills that have to be learned in the course of living deeply and well. *Die Wise* is for those who will fail to live forever. Dying well, Jenkinson writes, is a right and responsibility of everyone. It is not a lifestyle option. It is a moral, political, and spiritual obligation each person owes their ancestors and their heirs. *Die Wise* dreams such a dream, and plots such an uprising. How we die, how we care for dying people, and how we carry our dead: this work makes our capacity for a village-mindedness, or breaks it.

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Customer Reviews

“Stephen Jenkinson’s elegant and sorrow-freighted book brings prophetic insight rather than pastoral affirmations. A true story-man, Jenkinson paints image after image on the cave wall of his parchment. *Die Wise* is a formidable body of work, road-tested in ways most of us hope never to know about. Stay with it, hold the sorrow as the gift it is, savor in small, immense chunks.

Every word is an invitation to trade fantasy for imagination. There isn't a book like it.

• Dr. Martin Shaw, author of *Snowy Tower: Parzival and the Wet, Black Branch of Language*

STEPHEN JENKINSON MTS MSW is an activist, teacher, author, and farmer. He has a master's degree in theology from Harvard University and a master's degree in social work from the University of Toronto. Formerly a program director at a major Canadian hospital and medical-school assistant professor, Stephen is now a sought-after workshop leader, speaker, and consultant to palliative care and hospice organizations. He is the founder of The Orphan Wisdom School in Canada and the subject of the documentary film *Griefwalker*.

I had quite mixed reactions to this book. On the one hand, the author clearly has many years of experience working with dying people, their families, and various health workers. He writes with great sensitivity. Sometimes his stories brought back vivid memories of deaths of loved ones: the mysterious course that life can take; the fear on all sides; the unknowns; the frustration with the medical system; the strangeness of it all (especially watching someone's consciousness wax and wane - can they hear us? are they aware?) and the relief that simple kindness could bring. Several things make this a difficult read: first, the subject matter; also, an underlying cynicism from Jenkinson, and partly the writing itself, which tends to be wordy and to wander in unexpected directions, the way one might in an impassioned conversation about a cherished subject. Jenkinson repeats his ideas many times, and spends long stretches of the book telling us what is **not** working in our society's approach to death before finally beginning to write about how to "die wise." He is extremely critical of the modern practices that extend the lives of people with life threatening illnesses, and of palliative care as offered today. The implications and complications of all of this are revisited many times: "more time" (to live) means "more dying" (as opposed to a quick, peaceful death that is not anticipated.) However, as the chapters go by, Jenkinson's ideas for a better way gradually emerge, and well into the book, he writes eloquently and passionately about true acceptance of death and honest conversation with the dying, as opposed to "cheerleading" and denial of what is really happening. He uses lots of imagery from nature, and occasionally quotes beautiful poetry to underscore his points. Not the easiest read, but in the midst it all, there are touching and even beautiful moments. Recommended to readers who can be patient and flexible with the above.

I think Jenkinson's book is great for discussion and debates about end-of-life care, even though there was much in it with which I did not agree. Often I got lost in his long, philosophical discussions. I wish too, that he had met Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, he might have a better understanding of what she attempted in relation to the stages. Jenkinson's book is not completely my cup of tea, but he is bright and provocative. It is always good to have one's ideas challenged; and his book will definitely do this!

I really wanted to understand this book, to digest it and have it be of some aid to me while actively grieving as I was watching my 94 year old father's health decline. That being said it was a difficult read and maybe just a mere 100 pages and I decided to buy the audiobook. This enabled me to hear the author's words, hear him accentuate and emphasize what needed to be heard. Oh and what a delight it was. Sometimes would read along as he spoke sometimes just listen without the written word. This also allowed me to be able to replay what he had just said if I didn't understand it. At times, whole paragraphs of the book I didn't understand but I'd repeat them in his words and listen again and again until I got it. The richness of his words spoken by him enabled me to really glean much from his beautiful life's work.

I am a metastatic cancer patient. I read Stephen Jenkinson slowly, taking it in in small doses. Which is to say that he has thought about these things far more deeply than I have ! I love this book. I am deeply grateful he wrote it.

This book offers a real, road-tested and sacred - that is to say "real" - way of questioning, feeling, thinking about and apprenticing oneself and one's culture to Death, and therefore, also to Life. Here may be the most grounded book on Death and Dying that we have, based as it is in such lengthy and reflective actual experience with folks who have died. Poetic, soulful, and guiding, in a profoundly respectful and reflective fashion, "Die Wise" provides a view into dying, and a way of grieving by doing that most folks don't seem to know of or talk about, yet which we could each come to be close with and appreciate, and which actually seems to be part of the fabric of life and death that surrounds us every day and each night here in "the West". In reading the pages of this heartfelt, soul-stirring and meaningful manifesto, I find myself witnessing a possibility for befriending a host of realities that seem to have been hidden from myself and my people for most of our lives. I was thunderstruck, while listening to Stephen's stories, to realize that although I'm 44 years old, I've only witnessed one person dying and have never been present for a birth. How alive can I be under

those circumstances and how can I know about how to proceed with such limited fuel and basis for existence, and what can my culture really know if it acts the way it does?! Also, how unusual are my personal circumstances - is my own experience possibly the "norm"? The experience of receiving this awesome offering is a finding and a making of dark yet vibrant nourishment and realizing for the first time how hungry and how thirsty I have truly been, without fully grasping that until now. Worthy food and drink are offered up here, to be sure, in these mighty and very human, finely wrought pages. I hold these words with me as I seek to feed myself and my family, friends and colleagues, and to be fed by the unexpected yet ever-present heart-breaks that seem to peek or cry out around each corner. The seeds in my heart, as well as in my garden are listening and are thankful. May the new sprouts ever recall the old ones - Many Thanks to You Stephen for this Mentorship in the vital written craft of language!!!

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