

# SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE END

BY B.J MILLER  
SHOSHANA BERGER



# **Summary of A Beginner's Guide to the End by B.J Miller and Shoshana Berger**

**Written by Alyssa Burnette**

The living person's guide to death.

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
How to Cope With a Terminal Diagnosis .....	6
You Can't Take it With You Go.....	8
Letting Go of the Past.....	10
Final Summary.....	12



**DO YOU WANT THIS BOOK  
AS AN 20-MINUTE AUDIOBOOK?**



**Get the key insights of non-fiction books  
in minutes instead of hours. Listen to  
our free audiobooks while you workout  
or on your commute to work.**



**DOWNLOAD  
OUR FREE APP**



# Introduction

“Today is your best day!”

“Live every day as if it’s your last!”

These catchy slogans are often marketed at human beings, encouraging us to cherish the gift of life. And although they’re certainly correct in their intentions, the sad reality is that their trite and pithy nature often invites dismissal. We shrug off well-meaning messages and forget the true value and blessing of life. By contrast, we regularly take our blessings for granted and complain our way through the days, naively assuming that we have an endless number of days stretching out in front of us. It’s only when we are confronted with something truly life-altering-- like a terminal diagnosis-- that we genuinely begin to consider the fleeting nature of our lives. And only then do we start to appreciate the temporal beauty of our existence here on earth. Over the course of this summary, we’ll deconstruct our Westernized view of death and dying and learn how to cut through the culture of toxic positivity that dominates our discourse about death.



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://www.quickread.com/app)

# How to Cope With a Terminal Diagnosis

“What would you do if you only had a year left to live?”

This question is frequently tossed out as a motivational challenge to help us re-evaluate our life choices and priorities. Similarly, movies like *The Fault in Our Stars* romanticize the discovery of a terminal diagnosis as being the primary source of conflict in the plot. But in reality, being told that you only have a short time left to live would hurt like a punch to the gut. This discovery would, quite literally, turn your whole world upside down. All of a sudden, everything you know and everything you’ve planned would be different. There’s no doubt that the pronouncement of a terminal diagnosis is a terrible and traumatic moment. But unfortunately, it can also be a very common moment. Although we often think of tragedies as being things that happen to “other people,” the sad truth is that trauma can befall any of us at any time. And that’s why it’s important to prepare for the end before it hits. We prepare for many other things-- tests, surgeries, marriage, parenthood-- but our culture of toxic positivity means that we often prefer to avoid death instead of preparing for it. As a result, diagnoses can leave us floundering and shell-shocked. That’s why the authors want to help other people from experiencing this same trauma.

So, what can you do to prepare for receiving a terminal diagnosis? The authors believe that, above all, self-care is critical. So, don’t try to pressure yourself into accepting the harsh reality of your diagnosis right away. Instead, you want to cushion yourself from the blow by surrounding yourself with as many comforts and coping mechanisms as possible. For example, you can treat yourself by indulging in frequent meals from your favorite restaurants or enjoying your favorite cocktail. You might also want to find comfort in one of your favorite places or activities. No matter how much time you have left, the important thing is keeping yourself comfortable, so don’t be afraid to indulge in a lot of extra self-care right now. You also shouldn’t feel pressured to break the news to anyone right now. Receiving the news was a shock to you and it will be to your loved ones as well. So, if you know

that sharing your diagnosis will be an emotional and complex conversation, don't feel like you have to force that conversation right away.

But by the same token, it is absolutely okay to surround yourself with your support system right now. Even if they don't know yet, you can lean on them to provide some much-needed comfort and support. In fact, you may find it especially comforting to know that they don't know yet. That's because dying makes people awkward. That might sound like a weird thing to say, but it's true! Even though we know we'll all die someday, it's easier to avoid thinking about it until we absolutely have to. It's also hard to know that you'll be losing someone you love. This can make people feel awkward and they might struggle to know what to say. They might not behave "normally" for a while and this can be stressful for you and for them. So, if you want to wait to tell them, it's okay to enjoy the normalcy for a little while before you break the news. There's no pressure to post about it on social media or tell everyone you know right away; you can wait until you're ready.

The authors observe that you should also avoid googling your condition at this stage. Whether your diagnosis is a shock or something you've been expecting for awhile, reading the medical specifics can be anxiety-inducing. So, don't fall down the Google rabbit hole. Your doctor can provide you with the relevant information, as well as resources like support groups, and this can help you avoid the overwhelming horror of information overload. You also don't want to make any big decisions out of the blue. When people ask the question, "What would you do if you only had a year left to live?" this is often what they mean. The idea is that news of a terminal diagnosis might prompt you to do something wonderful and spontaneous, like confessing your love to your soul mate or completing all the items on your bucket list. But in reality, rash decisions might be toxic and unhealthy. Shortly after you receive your diagnosis, you're still suffering from a terrible shock! And as a result, you're probably not thinking clearly. So, don't make any rash decisions and don't feel pressured to do anything.



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://quickread.com/app)

## You Can't Take it With You Go

We hear this phrase all the time and we accept it as truth. It's a good reminder to avoid prioritizing material goods over people. After all, the things you accumulate on earth can't follow you into the afterlife, so you shouldn't make them the focus of your life. But since you can't take it with you when you go, have you ever thought about what you would want to do with all your stuff? The authors observe that clearing out your house is a great way to cope with a terminal diagnosis because it makes things easier for you and your loved ones. For example, if you're a very private person, you might not like the idea of people rummaging around in your things when you're gone. Or you might want to save your family a task and sort through your things yourself.

The authors observe that a special kind of closure can come from sorting through the detritus of your own life. For one thing, you can pass surrounded by the people and possessions you loved most. And for another, you can find comfort as you look through a lifetime of memories and reflect on all the experiences you've enjoyed through the years. The grieving process can also be more bearable for your loved ones if they don't have to face the task of clearing out your house on their own. There is a kind of peace that arises from knowing they don't have that responsibility. Rather than focusing on stressful logistics and responsibilities, they can be free to focus on their own grieving process.

But clearing out your own house can also eliminate another type of stress. Everyone knows that relatives bicker about what has been left to whom. People often get angry about wills or feel resentful about the division of someone's assets. And with the deceased unable to advocate for themselves, things can get ugly and confusing in a hurry. But if you decide what you're going to give to whom, it can clear up a lot of that confusion! By handling this process while you're still alive, you can have a conversation with your friends and family to avoid any future distress. You can learn who wants to keep what and you may discover some heartwarming sentiments along the way. For example, you might not know that your daughter cherishes a certain pair of



earrings that you always wore. But by having a conversation with her, you might discover that she would love to keep those earrings as a constant reminder of her mom. Ultimately, how you choose to divide your assets is completely your decision. But it's worth considering any updates that might simplify the process and soothe everyone's feelings.



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://quickread.com/app)

## Letting Go of the Past

Now that we've talked about clearing out your home, it's also important to talk about clearing out your heart. Everyone has secrets and regrets we carry with us and it's important to relinquish this emotional baggage before you die. A great way to start is by forgiving yourself for anything you might be ashamed of. That doesn't mean that you have to sugarcoat the truth or shirk responsibility. Rather, forgiving yourself is about acknowledging that you may have done some things you regret-- and that's okay. Even if you feel that you have done terrible things and deeply hurt people you love, it's important to acknowledge that you don't deserve a life sentence for your crimes. You deserve to pass on in peace, having forgiven yourself for your actions on earth.

But it's also important to try to make it right. If you're holding a grudge against a friend or family member, let it go and try to re-connect with them. If it's your responsibility to say, "I'm sorry" to someone, why not give them that apology now? If you have wronged others badly, they might not be receptive to your apology. But their acceptance and forgiveness shouldn't be the goal of your apology. Instead, you should simply do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. And even if the other person doesn't accept your apology, it will probably mean a lot to them to know that you did express regret. But on the flipside, your apologies might rekindle some lost relationships. For example, if you haven't spoken to one of your children in years, this might be the catalyst that motivates you both to heal the relationship and reconnect. But whether your efforts spark new relationships or not, you may find it very freeing to know that you've done the right thing. At the very least, you can pass in peace knowing that you have done everything in your power to make things right while you were alive.

This sense of peace can also apply to the confessions of hidden secrets. Most of us probably don't have a *Law and Order: SVU*-style secret to confess on our death beds. Chances are, you don't have a secret family and you probably aren't a serial killer who never got caught. But if you do have any buried secrets that your family doesn't know about, it might be a good idea to come

clean before the truth comes out on its own and hurts them even more. For example, if you have a wacky sexual fetish that you've successfully hidden for years, you probably don't want your family finding your paraphernalia when they clean out your house after your death. In this case, what they don't know won't hurt them, so maybe it's best to toss out the sex toys on your own before anyone finds them. But if you have other secrets like a lover or a secret child, these things might come to light after your death. In fact, your death might even lead to messy issues like people contesting your will and this will only hurt your family more. So, if you have any secrets of this nature, it's probably best to tell the truth yourself so you can spare your family any more pain.



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://quickread.com/app)

## Final Summary

There's no doubt about it: dying is an awkward subject. But it's also a subject that every single human being will have to confront one day. That's why the authors believe that we should be prepared for death. Rather than sugar coating the subject or hiding behind toxic positivity, let's confront the end head on and try to make our passing as painless as possible for ourselves and our loved ones. To that end, the authors recommend prioritizing self-care and preparation above all else.

If you receive a terminal diagnosis, it will be a stressful and traumatic moment, so be kind to yourself as you process the news. Don't worry about rushing the process; let yourself take as long as you need. You should also feel free to pursue your favorite comforts and coping mechanisms. Don't feel pressured to share the news right away. And lastly, you might want to clear out your home and your heart so that you can pass with a clean house and a clear conscience.



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://www.quickread.com/app)



**DO YOU WANT THIS BOOK  
AS AN 20-MINUTE AUDIOBOOK?**



**Get the key insights of non-fiction books  
in minutes instead of hours. Listen to  
our free audiobooks while you workout  
or on your commute to work.**



**DOWNLOAD  
OUR FREE APP**

