



Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death

Richard Holloway

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death

Richard Holloway

Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death Richard Holloway

Where do we go when we die? Or is there nowhere to go? Is death something we can do or is it just something that happens to us?

Now in his ninth decade, former Bishop of Edinburgh Richard Holloway has spent a lifetime at the bedsides of the dying, guiding countless men and women towards peaceful deaths. In *The Last Bus*, he presents a positive, meditative and profound exploration of the many important lessons we can learn from death: facing up to the limitations of our bodies as they falter, reflecting on our failings, and forgiving ourselves and others.

But in a modern world increasingly wary of acknowledging mortality, *The Last Bus* is also a stirring plea to reacquaint ourselves with death. Facing and welcoming death gives us the chance to think about not only the meaning of our own life, but of life itself; and can mean the difference between ordinary sorrow and unbearable regret at the end.

Radical, joyful and moving, *The Last Bus* is an invitation to reconsider life's greatest mystery by one of the most important and beloved religious leaders of our time.

Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death Details

Date : Published March 1st 2018 by Canongate Books

ISBN :

Author : Richard Holloway

Format : Kindle Edition 177 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Philosophy, Autobiography, Memoir, Death, Religion

 [Download Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Dea ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death Richard Holloway

From Reader Review Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death for online ebook

Helga says

Page 25. The best way to see religion is as humanity's response to the puzzle of its own existence. Unlike other animals on earth, we have never felt entirely at home here.

Page 37 Cathedrals are perfectly apt for the complicated times we live in. I am fully aware of the paradox here. I have mentioned it already. It is those who believe in the prose of religion who keep it alive for those of us who can now only survive on its poetry.

Page 136 Grief is shattering but it can be survived if we let ourselves experience it. It has to become, not bypassed, muffled or diverted. An important part of doing it is a names is, the work of remembrance, of going back over the life we have lost as if searching for clues that might solve the mystery of its departure.

Richard Stableford says

Richard Holloway, a former Bishop of Edinburgh, reflects on life and death. He is now in his 80's, although I am younger, at 60 the very strong likelihood is that I more years behind me than ahead. Bishop Richard has courted controversy with many conservative Christians, it is no shock to read him state that he doesn't believe in God or in Heaven. I, as a Christian, sit somewhere between been not a conservative, but not a full blown liberal. I must admit for some time I have felt there could be a God without necessarily there been an afterlife. On this one I tend to agree with Dave Tomlinson in his book "Black sheep and Prodigals" that there may or may not be a Heaven, but the emphasis should be our living now. The book is short but wide ranging, looking at different views of an afterlife, scientific ideas on delaying or cheating death, preparing for death. The book has helpful advice such as writing to those you leave, and closes with a helpful section on accepting and making peace with your shadow self. I found this a helpful read and would recommend it to anyone who is starting to think about the fact that death is closer than we might prefer to accept.

Snickerdoodle says

I loved this book. I loved the way he talked about things - serious subjects discussed in a personal but practical way - as though we'd shared long conversations - or long letters. He doesn't make himself out to be some great expert with all the answers although his experience and knowledge do give what he has to say some validity. He has something to add to the conversation surrounding death and dying, the here and now and the question of an afterlife, religions and belief and doubt. People don't like to talk about death but it's something that will happen to all of us. His approach is not sad or maudlin or preachy - he's just talking about it from a variety of perspectives.

Mark says

An interesting and valuable reflection in an - admittedly - beautifully produced format. Worth gifting to a friend in need.

Poetreehugger says

A most excellent treatment of the subject of life and death, and aging, for those of us who think about such things. Many wise and moving quotations and references, besides his own sound reasoning, and experiences recalled.

P. 15, "...Fearing the not-being-there that follows death is as silly as regretting that we weren't here before we were born." (Epicurius)

P. 85, re Courage as the wise person's response to the fear of going, and Gratitude as the answer to the desire to stay forever.

P. 134, re Grief "It has to be done."

P. 150, "...'Amor fati', love of the fate I was dealt..." Acceptance.

From my note about p. 6, I am left with a desire to find the poem "The Burning of the Leaves" by Binyon.

And so many more poems and books and songs and paintings I want to have a look at.

How good it is to read a book that makes you want to read more.

The Idle Woman says

Until two years ago, no one close to me had died; not since I'd been old enough to understand it. But 2016 came with chill winds and ruthlessness, and the last two years have seen the loss of five close family members. It hasn't been easy. But it has had one useful outcome. I used to be afraid of death. It was a terrifying transmutation that I didn't understand and didn't want to acknowledge. But necessity has changed that and now, in the light of my family's losses, I've had to accept it as an unavoidable part of human life. This all explains why I was drawn to this book, in which Richard Holloway – former Bishop of Edinburgh; thinker; compassionate critic; agnostic – uses his own old age as a spur to think about how we can live well and, when it comes to it, die well. Open-hearted and generous, studded with poetry and his memories of friends, it's rather beautiful: inspiring and, oddly enough, rather upbeat...

For the full review, please see my blog:

<https://theidlewoman.net/2018/04/10/w...>

Keeley says

I received this one for review from NetGalley.

I have mixed feelings about this one. I wanted so badly to enjoy it, but unfortunately ended up DNF'ing at around 56%.

Richard Holloway is a Bishop that has spent decades assisting people to achieve a peaceful death. *Waiting for the Last Bus* is less of a memoir and more of a commentary on grief, forgiveness and religion. There were definitely parts of his writing that I enjoyed. For example, throughout each chapter Holloway would provide segments of poetry and other works to help demonstrate the concepts he was writing about which I felt added to the overall atmosphere of the book. And I did find his writing style enjoyable and easy to read.

However, at one point he writes about older adults being mistreated because of their age without ever explicitly referring to this mistreatment as ageism. I'm not sure what the disconnect was at that point in the book, but it was frustrating because I was really wishing he would call it what it was.

Additionally, for a while he speaks about whether or not humans are able to make choices in their life and then moves into asking for forgiveness. I really struggled with this section because it felt as if the author were saying that everything is completely out of our hands and we are incapable of making decisions (good or bad) which conflicted with other statements in the book up to that point.

Maybe if I considered myself a religious or spiritual person I would have enjoyed this more. But after a while I felt that the content became disjointed and I had a hard time keeping track of what he was trying to say.

Shirley Revill says

I really enjoyed listening to this audiobook it was very thought provoking.
Very well written and narrated. Recommended.

FIONA Norris says

I have been reading Richard Holloway for many years now - from the thought-provoking 'Godless Morality, via the fascinating and challenging 'On Forgiveness' to the widely read memoir 'Leaving Alexandria'. Holloway is a clever, deeply reflective writer, who has grappled with the challenges of religious belief for almost all of his life. In this book, he draws on his very personal experience - he's in his ninth decade - to think about approaches to death and dying. In doing so, as you might expect given that he made his living for very many years as a Professor of Divinity and Episcopalian priest, he draws on the narratives of religion. But he also pays his dues to a rich variety of artistic sources, particularly poetry, which have inspired and informed his reflections. I have to confess that since I also enjoy many of his favourite writers - Larkin, MacNeice, Joan Didion, Julian Barnes - this enhanced the reading experience for me, considerably; as did - and I know some people might feel that I am drifting into bathos here - his love of dogs, the sadness he feels at the death of his old dog Daisy and the realisation that he is too old to have another dog to share his wanderings in the Pentland Hills.

I have two wee quibbles though: firstly, because I have read some of his earlier works, some of the ground he is covering seems too familiar, too well-trodden; and secondly, probably because the book was a series of radio essays, the linking structure doesn't always hang together - it feels as though it wanders about a bit too much. However, this is still a very good book; and if you have never read Holloway before, and you are interested in reflections on mortality -and why wouldn't you be, since none of us will escape it - there is a lot to enjoy here from the pen of this erudite, and most humble of human beings.

Janice says

This book is a very inspiring read about the concept and the reality of death and dying. I hope to achieve even a measure of Richard Holloway's wisdom in my life. This book is an excellent start. Highly recommended for all us mortal beings.

My thanks to NetGalley for the eARC in exchange for my honest review.

TROY CROWHURST says

WAITING FOR THE LAST BUS – RICHARD HOLLOWAY

I had not heard of Richard Holloway before reading this book. I understand that he has been a cleric by profession. But he is perhaps more interestingly, a student of religion and a man who has essentially abandoned a literal interpretation of Christian doctrine and focused on religion's value to us in a more human and social context. In this book, informed by numerous diverse sources, he considers our human condition, our will to live and particularly, our inevitable demise.

My initial feeling is that the book is presented in a slightly bitty and disjointed way. Some chapters are not distinct enough and several points are revisited if not repeated. There are perhaps too many quotes and references. And I don't agree with all that he says. For example, because we socially have become more accepting of women's and gay rights, that does not necessarily mean in itself that we have developed a greater moral compass. Certainly not as individuals. This is not explored to sufficient degree. Furthermore, he gets a little too fanciful in imagining an 'ultimate form of inequality' with some kind of revolt by the poor occurring if/when it became the norm in society for wealthier individuals to preserve their bodies to be revived in future years. More likely is that they'd simply be jealous: individualism rules. But such is Holloway's bent towards human nature righting itself.

Nevertheless, my feelings towards the book remain essentially positive. I admire Holloway's independent mind, I agree with his views on death and dying, both the negative implications socially on our health service and just as importantly, his realistic appraisal of what death really means to us and how we could best prepare ourselves.

In this day and age it was also particularly refreshing, in his last chapter, to witness such soul searching honesty and humility in anyone talking about their own character. Getting to know the 'stranger' that is yourself: it touched more on confession. And was no less moving for that. Beautifully written.

But this book remains perhaps best viewed perhaps as a reference book, a distillation of interesting ideas and an invitation to explore other work. Due partly to the emotive subject matter, but also through delicate handling, there are several passages that may well leave a lump in your throat. I have selected three particular subjects raised, supported by Holloway's anecdotes or quotations, that will be hard to forget:

The first is that gratitude, however awkward, is the appropriate attitude to adopt in facing death in old age.

When we look at the bigger picture, most of us have been blessed with the good fortune to experience life on this planet and for that at least we should think ourselves lucky. Holloway quotes a very eloquent passage from the end of Alan Hollinghurst's novel *The Line of Beauty*, in which the hero Nick, an early victim of the AIDS epidemic, anticipates a positive test result and his imminent death:

'He (Nick) tried to rationalize the fear, but its pull was too strong and original. It was inside himself, but the world around him, the parked cars, the cruising taxi, the church spire among the trees, had also been changed. They had been revealed.....The emotion was startling.....It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional.....It wasn't just this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful.'

The convincing idea here is that death will reveal the beauty of the world to us and we should no doubt consider this sooner.

The second issue is Holloway's recounting a touching little story about his own father.

Holloway writes persuasively about the role fate has on our lives, how we must ultimately 'play the cards dealt us', one aspect being how often the poor through history have suffered at the hands of time and change. Holloway's father was a man of working class stock, a proud man who 'endured hardship without complaining'. As a young man he became a successful 'block printer' allowed even to wear a 'bowler hat' as

a reflection of his esteemed status. But through changes in technology, still as a young man, his trade became obsolete and he literally had to find any work going for the rest of his life.

Nothing was ever mentioned about this forced change, but several years later, in his father's small two roomed cottage, Holloway discovered a small cloth-wrapped bundle under his father's bed: he had kept two 'mells', the tools of his original trade. Holloway reflects on what meaning his father attached to those 'mells', the 'pride and purpose' they must have given him and the sense of 'betrayal and disappointment' that he kept to himself.

Very touching.

However, still the most movingly discussed - and most emotive - subject raised in the book is how to manage - indeed how religion can manage - the death of a child. This is clearly a problem Holloway has encountered personally. We might accept with him in the cold light of day, that life is a lottery, that we come from nothing and return to it. We again will see, hear and be nothing. But in human terms the death of a child produces an impassioned cry for injustice. And how do you prepare a child to accept their death? As Holloway puts it: 'The priest is emptied of everything except defiance in the face of absolute loss'. And praying for the presence of a loving god is an 'act that contains its own meaning'. Belief or not in any literal religious truths become irrelevant.

It was through a novel, *Last of The Just*, about the Holocaust, by André Schwarz-Bart, that Holloway says he was able to reason out his thoughts on this matter. In one section Ernie Levy with his girlfriend Golda are with a band of children they have been protecting, on a 'death train' to Auschwitz. When another child dies, Ernie reassures the others 'He's asleep' and gently lays the body on a pile of other corpses.

One small girl remarks: 'He was my brother' and Ernie comforts her and tells her they will all eventually be happy in the Kingdom of Israel.

When another child asks if they will be able to get warm day and night there, Ernie again reassures him: 'Yes, that is how it will be.'

An accompanying woman digs her fingers in Ernie's shoulder with scorn and demands: 'How can you tell them it's only a dream?'

Ernie, giving way to dry sobs finally responds: 'Madame, there is no room for truth here.'

It is hard not to be effected on reading that!

In his book, Holloway presents a worthy argument that absolute or literal truths can be problematic for many people of faith today and that any religion not able to embrace what Keats called a 'Negative Capability' - whereby faith is evident in people not through literal truths or reason, but the 'poetry' of religion, like music, song and festivities - is in danger of signing its own death warrant.

Holloway also makes worthy proposals regarding 'remembrance' and 'forgiveness'. This is all well and good-intentioned.

But I must make one final point. Whilst it is commendable to 'forgive', especially at the point of someone's death, it can be hard simply to dismiss a person's dislikeable character throughout life. As a child Holloway admits to a romantic escapist adoration of John Wayne through his films at the cinema. He acknowledges rightly that 'John Wayne was an act', not the real, fat balding and toupee wearing Marion Morrison who had managed to avoid the 'draft'.

But Holloway lets him off the hook, suggesting that finally in death he faced up to the 'stranger' in himself with the words 'Let's go' as he was dying of cancer.

I don't know what real evidence there is of Wayne's change of attitude to humility, but sadly perhaps, I am more inclined to stick to a view of Wayne's character reflected in the autobiography of the film critic, Barry Norman.

When among a number of journalists brought over to interview Wayne, Norman aware of the star's extreme right views politically, asked him what he thought of Vietnam (where the war was raging on with no end in sight.) Wayne, drinking bourbon to excess, suggested calling Kosygin (then premier of the Soviet Union) and promising: 'You send....one more gun to Vietnam and we'll bomb Moscow.' Norman laughed, thinking him to be joking which was not the case. The interview disintegrated and when Norman remarked: 'You

can't be serious', Wayne took offence repeating back Norman's words, mimicking his English vowel sounds. With an instinctive mischievous wit, Norman quipped: 'That's very good. I didn't know you could do an English accent.'

My point is simply, that just occasionally, a bit of nasty medicine hits the spot. For all the goodwill that Holloway can find in the world.

Marie says

"We spend a lot of our time and effort not thinking about death."

"Humans are afflicted with tragic self-consciousness that does not seem to bother other animals. Pain that seems to be unique to humans is an awareness of our bodies is so keen it can lure us into depression and self-hatred."

"Accepting the reality of the way we look and the certainty of our death, maybe one day son, won't make us happy, but it might save us from the greater unhappiness of trying to ignore or hide from these realities."

"Much more difficult is giving up the prospect of the future. Not so much my own and that of my children and grandchildren. Not to be there to see them make their way through life."

"We are characters in a production that's been running for 14 billion years, and our roles were written for us long before we appeared on the scene. And we don't know if the show has an author. All of us alive are on stage at the moment, but we'll soon disappear like the 100 billion human beings who preceded us."

"What will our last moment alive be like? We may not be conscious when we finally slip away. But suppose we are. Will we notice it? Will we know it at the final moment? "

"According to Hindu teaching, your soul or spirit is a wandere that's had many lives in the past before it came into the one you happen to be in at the moment. And it will live many more lives in the future when this one is over."

"A Vatican decree in 2016 forbidding Catholics from keeping the ashes of their departed at home, scattering them in nature of dividing them between members of the family."

"The opposite of gratitude for life is greed for more of it. It is the inability to enjoy what we have now because we are already lusting after the next edition."

"Be brave in the face of death. Be sad at leaving. But don't let those be your final emotions. Let it be gratitude for the life you had."

"People too easily forget that words can't do everything. Some things just can't be said."

"Humans are rarely at peace with themselves and find it hard to live with the muddle and confusion. They are always on the lookout for a savior who will chase all their troubles away."

"There are those for whom religious observance in this life is a way of guaranteeing their status in the next."

"Time not only steals those we love; it even steals our memories of them."

"Those we love leave us. We see them no longer, but we try to hold on to them as long as we can."

"I don't miss my life now, I miss it then, missing it while I was in the midst of it."

"We didn't get to deal our hand in life. We only got to play the cards we were given. And how we play the last card can win the game."

Joanne Mcleod says

A wonderful testament to life in the discussion of death.

As I read the pages, I often thought how my Dad would appreciate this book, and I would have to tell him about it. Then in the next breath I would remember my Dad dying almost exactly two months ago. This book, like many others, came to me, rather serendipitous, to comfort me in my grief.

Also in terms of timing, it felt right to read his wisdom, just as a beloved poet, Mary Oliver breathed her last breaths.

"Courage can be death's last gift to us, if we'll grasp it."

Ruth Innes says

Just read it. I'm about to read it again.

Rebecca says

Never fear: it's not your average pie-in-the-sky Christian talk in Richard Holloway's brand-new book about old age and death. Holloway was a career priest and has written nearly 30 theological works, but he comes at things from a refreshingly different angle. In *Leaving Alexandria*, one of my all-time favorite memoirs, he recorded his drift away from orthodoxy – even as he rose through the ranks of the Church of Scotland to become Bishop of Edinburgh. He recognizes morality as provisional (like in another of his books I've read, *Godless Morality*) – the Church has changed its mind about women and gay people, for instance – and doesn't waste time pondering the supernatural or the chance of eternal life, but he still thinks religion has lessons to teach us about how we can approach death with dignity.

The thematic scaffolding of this short book, which grew out of a Radio 4 series that aired in 2016, is acceptance versus denial. For Holloway, going prematurely bald was like a preview of ageing, and the futility of the quack hair restoration pills he ordered from a magazine was his first lesson in accepting what you cannot change about yourself. Seeing ourselves as we really are is a lifelong struggle, Holloway acknowledges; some only grasp their identity right at the end, as death approaches. Predestination is a doctrine common to Christianity and Islam, but he is more inclined to mix free will and fate. His recurring metaphor is of a deck of cards: life is a hand that you are dealt, but you get to choose exactly how to play it.

This is a richly allusive book, full of snatches of literature (especially poetry), as well as excerpts from

obituaries and from funeral addresses Holloway has given. He also discusses the fear of death, the dystopian possibilities of cryogenic freezing, countering regrets with forgiveness, and how the way we face death could redeem a disappointing life. Holloway's is a voice of wisdom worth heeding, and he is honest and humble instead of giving pat answers to life's enormous questions. I would be particularly likely to recommend this to readers of Julian Barnes's *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* who want a contrasting perspective.

A couple of favorite passages:

“I have ministered [Last Rites] myself and seen the peace they can bring at the end. I have sent good friends into the arms of a merciful God I was no longer sure I believed in. And I was convinced not only of the efficacy but of the honesty of what I was doing. I was not there to ventilate my doubts but to help the dying find the strength to cast off and take the tide that was pulling them out.”

“Religion is at its most compelling when it restrains the urge to explain death away and contents itself with voicing our sorrow and defiance that [death] keeps beating us into the ground. It feels most authentic when it stops preaching and becomes, instead, our song, our protest, the handkerchief waved against the immense tank looming at the corner of the street.”

Originally published on my blog, Bookish Beck.
