



Joy  
Comes  
in the  
Morning

Messages of Hope and Peace  
With a Personal Touch

*Paul W. Powell*

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in the  
Morning

**Messages of Hope and Peace  
With a Personal Touch**

by

**Paul W. Powell**

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*Dedicated  
to*

*C.W. Beard*

*Paul Chance*

*Elane Gabbert*

*Noble Hurley*

*Frank Marshall*

*Ben Murphy*

*Jerry Parker*

*Tommy Young*

*and all members of Floyd's Faithful  
Sunday School Class*

Good and generous people  
who love all pastors  
and whose help and encouragement  
has enriched my life.



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# Introduction

This is my third . . . and my last book of funeral messages. Frankly, the well has about run dry.

In the **Gospel For The Graveside and Death From The Other Side**, I included general information. All the sermons excluded any personal references to the family and deceased. I have not done that in this book. Rather, I am purposefully presenting the sermons almost as I delivered them on the day of the funeral with names and personal references included.

There are reasons for this.

- I thought it might be of special value to young preachers to see how I tried to move from the personal to the eternal. There are times when we must endure strong emotions and minister to others in our pastoral role.
- Second, I thought it might give some insight into the kinds of relationships that ought to exist between a pastor and his people. The call to be a shepherd is a call to be among the flock and to know the sheep. Too many pastors want to be pulpit performers and not real pastors.
- Third, I wanted to provide an outline or an illustration or a quote to help you prepare your own funeral messages.

These are not sermonic masterpieces. I know that. *Grieving folks do not need a masterpiece; they need peace from the master.* They need his presence in the combat zone as well as in the comfort zone of life. So this is one country preacher's effort to help provide comfort.

Following the funeral service, I often mailed a copy of my message to the grieving family. They seemed to appreciate that. Moreover, during the holiday season following the funeral, especially at Christmas, I would write a personal note to the family of the deceased to let them know that I continued to remember them and that holiday seasons were always the most difficult times for the grieving. Remember a joy shared is multiplied; a grief shared is a grief divided.

Without attempting to be profound, I have attempted to be personal, pastoral and biblical. I hope you find something in these pages that will help you do the same.

Sincerely,

Paul Powell  
5603 Elderwood  
Tyler, TX 75703

# Chapter 1

## Joy Comes In The Morning

*The Funeral of My Daughter-in-law*  
*Shaun Powell*

**TEXT: Psalm 30:5b**

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*On April 27, 1996 I buried my 35-year-old daughter-in-law who died of cancer. She was the wife of my middle son and the mother of my 8-year-old grandson Jordan.*

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Months after Vance Havner, the late old time evangelist lost his wife of 36 years he said, “I’m still in the valley but thank God I am walking through it, not wallowing in it.”

Actually, that is the most the scriptures promise us. In the context of God’s wonderful deliverance and his deep thanksgiving for what God has done for him, the psalmist says, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

This psalm, like all of David’s grows out of his life experiences. He has just gone through a time of great danger and difficulty. Rather than focus on his own distress he focuses on God’s deliverance. Out of deep gratitude he tells how God heard his prayers, saved his life and comforted his soul. Then he gives us this great promise of comfort and peace, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

When we lose a loved one in death weeping will come.

In addition, it may linger through a long, long night of sorrow and grief but thank God morning always follows the night - and our hope is that joy will come in the morning. An elderly friend who recently lost his wife in death shared a legend with me: Centuries ago the king of Persia ruled his country wisely and kindly. His son was to succeed him to the throne and he wanted to leave him with some wisdom that would help him survive the events that would accompany his rule - both good and bad. So, he instructed his wise men to search the world over and find the greatest of all wisdom and inscribe it on a gold ring for his son to wear. They searched and searched and found what they believed to be the greatest of all wisdom. It was this: "Even this shall pass away." That, of course, means that if something is good, enjoy it for it will pass away. In addition, if something is painful - endure it for it too will pass away.

We do well to remember that. The loss of a loved one is like a wound. The deeper the cut, the longer it takes to heal and the scar remains forever. Just so, the deeper the love, the deeper the grief and the longer the healing process. There is a sense in which we never get over the loss of a loved one. We just get through it and in time get on with it. However, in time, we will heal. The intensity of the pain will diminish and with the passing of time it will be more bearable.

What can hasten the healing? What can help bring joy in the morning?

- Good memories will help bring joy in the morning
- Getting busy will help bring joy in the morning
- The guarantee of heaven will bring joy in the morning
- God's grace will help bring joy in the morning.

## Keep Your Focus

First, good memories will help bring joy in the morning. If you will focus more on what you have had than what you have lost, it will bring joy in the morning. We all have regrets. It is inevitable that they shall come. Nevertheless, do not dwell on them.

LadyBird Johnson in her book “Life Without the Presence” speaks to this. She said, “Invariably there are some regrets about vanished opportunities. There are so many little things that I wish I had done. But I put my thoughts in to two categories, the ‘aren’t you glad that’s,’ and ‘if only.’ I try to keep that second column as short as possible. We should think about the first column ahead of time and savor things more when we have them. *To be close to death gives you a new awareness of the preciousness of life and the extreme frailty of it.* You must live everyday to the fullest as though you had short supply because you do. I said that glibly for years but I didn’t know how intensely one should live.”

The secret to joy coming in the morning is to focus on the “aren’t you glad that.” The regrets are usually there but do not dwell on them.

The old Stamps Baxter hymn, “Precious Memories” expresses it best.

*Precious memories, unseen angels,  
Sent from somewhere to my soul;  
How they linger, ever near me,  
And the sacred past unfold.  
Precious memories, how they linger,  
How they ever flood my soul,  
In the stillness of the midnight,  
Precious, sacred scenes unfold.*

## **Arise And Go Over Jordan**

Second, keeping busy will help bring joy in the morning. The Lord spoke to Joshua, “Now, after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, ‘Moses my servant is dead; now therefore rise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people’” (Joshua 1:1-2).

Sorrow came to us yesterday, and emptied our home. The first impulse now is to give up, and sit down in despair amid the wrecks of our hopes. However, we dare not do it. We are in the line of battle, and the crisis is at hand. To falter a moment would be to imperil some holy interest. Our pausing would harm other lives; holy interest would suffer, should our hands remain folded. We must not linger even to indulge our grief. We arise and go over Jordan.

## **We Shall Meet Again**

Third, the hope of heaven, the prospects of a reunion will help bring joy in the morning. We need to remember that death ends life, not a relationship. Therefore, we look to the future.

Once a loved one dies our attitude about heaven changes. When we are small children, we think of heaven as a great shining city with magnificent walls, domes and spires. But we do not think of people living there - only angels who were strangers to us.

Then someone we know dies, a brother, a sister, a parent and we begin to think of heaven as a place with wall, domes, spires, angels and one person we know. Several friends and acquaintances die. Then, one by one, our own children may die. No longer do we picture heaven as a place of vast walls and magnificent domes and spires. When we think of

heaven, we think of the many people we knew and loved ones that are living there - people like Shaun, and Pat, and Dad, and Mr. & Mrs. Vaught and the prospects of seeing them again.

A cousin of mine, Bev Hudgins, had been confined to bed with cancer for more than six months. However, she made an ardent and painful attempt to attend a concert she had long anticipated. I was lucky enough to be seated next to her. I asked, "What have you learned from your experiences with cancer?" She said, "I've learned it easy to say good-bye to all the material things. I am having a difficult time saying good-bye to those people who are closest to me. And I am grateful that there is one relationship, my relationship with God in eternity, that I won't ever have to say good-bye to."

The truth is, when we know Christ as Savior, we never really say good-bye to him because we continue to live even after death. Buckner Fanning told of sitting at his desk studying one day when his son Steven came into the room. He kept a picture of his boyhood pastor, the famed George W. Truett, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas on his desk.

Steven asked, "Dad, who is that?" He pointed to the picture of Truett. Buckner looked up and simply replied, "That's George W. Truett." Steven asked, "Who is he?" Buckner replied, "He was my boyhood pastor."

Steven then asked, "Where is he?" Buckner responded, not really wanting to be disturbed, "He's dead."

After a long pause Steven said, "Dad, he's not dead. He just died."

We feel that way in the face of death about Shaun. She is not dead. She just died. She is actually more alive today than ever before. She is alive with him and in a better place.

D.L. Moody told about a Christian woman who was always bright, cheerful and optimistic although she was confined to her room because of illness. She lived in an attic apartment on the fifth floor of an old, rundown building. A friend decided to visit her on day and brought along another women - a person of great wealth. Since there was no elevator, the two women began the long climb upward. When they reached the second floor, the well-to-do woman commented, "What a dark and filthy place!" Her friend replied, "It's better higher up."

When they arrived at the third landing, the remark was made, "Things look even worse here." Again the reply, "It's better higher up." The two women finally reached the attic level, and they found the bedridden saint of God. A smile on her face radiated the joy that filled her heart. Although the room was clean and flowers were on the windowsill, the wealthy visitor could not get over the stark surrounding in which this woman lived. She blurted it out, "It must be very difficult for you to be here like this!" Without a moments hesitation the shut-in responded, "It's better higher up." She was not looking at temporal things. With the eyes of faith fixed on the eternal, she found the secret of true satisfaction and contentment that brings joy in the morning.

### **Serenity in Prayer**

Finally, the grace of God will help bring joy in the morning. There is great strength in simply communicating with God. Prayer is primarily communication. Nothing can sustain and strengthen us more in our difficult moments and days than the sense of the presence of God. In times of profound grief, many people say the "don't feel like praying." One suggestion is simply seek to learn to pray what is known as the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the

serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Let us not forget that the Holy Spirit was provided to us as a comforter. What a source of strength he must have been to the disciples. What a source of strength it can be to us today.

When Shaun was on her deathbed we told our eight-year-old grandson, Jordan, that we did not expect his mother to live. We were not aware of how much he understood, but the next day, as my wife drove him to the hospital, he asked, “Mimi, what if my daddy dies, will I have to go to one of those homes?” She replied, “What are you talking about? Are you talking about a foster home?” He replied, “Yes, that’s what I’m talking about.”

She replied, “O, no, you’d never have to go to one of those homes. You have me and Paul and your Nonnie and Grandpa, and Uncle Joey and Aunt Charlotte, and Aunt Lori and Uncle Kent. And we’d take care of you.”

He then asked, “But what if all of you died except Uncle Kent?” He was pushing the edge of the envelope. He like any 8-year-old did not really comprehend death so his primary concern was himself. He wanted to know what was going to happen to him.

She said, “Why Uncle Kent would take care of you.” Then Jordan asked, “But what if he couldn’t find me?” His grandmother replied, “He would search the world over until he found you

That, is a beautiful picture of the grace of God. He comes to us in our hour of deepest sorrow no matter where we are and brings comfort to and strengthens our hearts. So, because of his grace, there is hope of joy in the morning.

I think if Shaun could speak today she would use the words of the poet who wrote:

*When I come to the end of the road  
And the sun has set for me,  
I want no rights in the gloom-filled room,  
Why cry for a soul set free.*

*Miss me a little but not too long,  
And not with your head bowed low.  
Remember the love that we once shared,  
Miss me - but let me go.*

*For this is a journey we all must take  
And each must go alone.  
It's all a part of the Master's plan,  
A step on the road to home.*

*When you are lonely and sick at heart  
Go to the friends you know  
And bury your sorrow in doing good deeds  
Miss me - but let me go.*

# Chapter 2

## Know Ye Not That A Great Man Has Fallen

*Funeral Service of My Boyhood Pastor  
Dr. John Wright*

**TEXT: II Samuel 3:38**

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*As my  
boyhood  
pastor, Dr.  
John Wright  
touched my  
life more  
deeply than  
any man  
alive or dead  
apart from  
Jesus Christ.  
He was my  
spiritual  
father. This  
sermon is a  
tribute to a  
“Great  
Man.”*

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When Saul, king of Israel, was killed, Abner, commander of his army, pledged his loyalty to David, the new king. Nevertheless, shortly afterwards Abner also was killed by a jealous rival. When word of Abner’s death came to David, he said to his servants, “Know ye not that a prince and a great man is fallen in Israel?”

If we had royalty in America, I would say to you today, “A prince has fallen among us.” But, since we do not, I simply remind you that “a great man has fallen among us” today.

It is not hard to understand why I think Dr. John M. Wright was a great man. He touched my life more deeply than any man alive or dead, apart from Jesus Christ himself. In fact, I can safely say, I am what I am by the grace of God and by the goodness and

influence of Brother Wright. And, not only did he touch my life, he touched the lives of thousands of others just like me during his 90 years.

I grew up in the shadow of First Baptist Church, Port Arthur, Texas, when it was located in downtown. Church was not a part of my family's life. In fact, I was never once taken to church in my formative years — not at Christmas, not at Easter, not for a wedding, not for a funeral, not ever!

When I was 14, I began attending the First Baptist Church at the invitation of a friend. I soon learned that the church had a softball team and a basketball team, and if you attended Sunday school three out of four Sundays a month you could play on those teams. At the age of 14 I was not missing God from my life, but I sure knew how to play softball and basketball. Moreover, I was willing to take the religion in order to get the recreation. However, as you know by now, I found more than religion or recreation, I found redemption. I became a Christian.

The church then became my spiritual family and Brother John became my spiritual father. Christ was like a pencil sharpener to me - he gave a point to my life. In addition, the church was there to help. It gave to me a faith, a family and the encouragement I needed in those formative years.

In time, God called me to preach. Brother Wright then became my greatest encourager, my mentor and my counselor. I am sure he did the same for other young people as he did for me, but he made me think I was special.

The first time I preached, he secured the invitation for me. The first time I ate in a restaurant, he invited me and paid the bill. The first time I saw a college campus, he took me. The first book I owned, apart from the Bible, he gave to me.

He licensed me to preach, married Cathy and me,

ordained me to the ministry and invited me to preach a revival in his church. He secretly hoped, he told me, I would succeed him. However, I was not about to do that! I was smart enough to know the man who followed him would have a difficult time. I knew he would be the benchmark by which all future pastors would be measured, and I was sure I would not measure up.

One day, while I was still struggling with the decision to leave the pastorate and become president of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, my telephone rang. It was Brother John. He simply said the Lord gave me a verse for you today, “You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many.”

I responded, “Oh, Brother Wright, don’t tell me that. I’ve already decided to turn down the Presidency of the Annuity Board.” However, as was often the case, he knew God’s will for my life before I did.

He taught me some enduring lessons. Once, when I was to preach for him, I said, “Brother John, I’m scared. This is the first time I’ve ever preached in a church when the pastor was present.” He replied, “Remember this, the Lord is always present and listening and he’s the one who matters.” I remembered.

On another Sunday I was serving as youth pastor. We were about to walk out of the vestibule and on to the platform, I had a bulletin sticking out of my coat pocket. He noticed it and told me to put it in my Bible. He said, “When you go into the pulpit, remember you represent the King. Always look your best.” I remembered!

When I became pastor of the Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler he made me a plaque. It was cut on an angle from a large pine tree so the bark was still around the edges. It was intended to be mounted on a post and placed

in a flower bed. On the plaque he had carved the words, “Bloom where you are planted.” He was reminding me to put down roots and produce fruit where I was. I remembered!

John Wright was a great man, not because of what he did for me. Rather, he did those things for me because he was a great man. Jesus said, “Let the one who would be greatest among you become the servant of all.” John Wright was great because he had a servant’s heart. He served God and he served others — even little people like me.

In what way was John Wright great? What makes any person great? It certainly is not wealth, or power, or fame. True greatness is rather in those things that endure. To me he was great because:

- He walked comfortably before all men
- He walked consistently with the Lord
- He walked confidently toward eternity

These are always marks of greatness. They are qualities that ought to mark us.

### **A Friend to Every Man**

First, great men walk comfortably before all people. The gospel writers said of Jesus, “The common people heard him gladly.” That was true of Brother John also. Though he was highly educated and well read, he was neither Ivy League nor ivory tower. He was grassroots, down to earth. He spoke so the common man could understand him.

The late M. B. Carroll told that on one occasion a little girl approached him and said, “Dr. Carroll, I love your sermons. When you preach I’m right with you . . . and sometimes I’m a little ahead of you.” That was John Wright. Simple but never shallow. He was as much at home with a

street sweeper as with a bookkeeper, with the garbage collector as with the bank director, with a woman on the street as with as the cop on the beat. He walked with equal grace and dignity among all races and all classes. Man made distinctions meant nothing to him. He was dignified but not stuffy. Children loved him. Women admired him. Strong men respected and followed him.

He loved a good story, and, he could by his raised eyebrows, by cutting his eyes, and by his laugh, endure himself to almost anyone. Like Caleb of old, he wholly followed the Lord. However, he did not let it make a fool out of him. He was great in his humanness.

### **The Real Secret**

Second, great men walk consistently with the Lord. I never visited with Brother John but what he had a verse, an outline, a sermon idea, he wanted to share with me. He lived and breathed to preach. He was committed to the Lord Jesus and that commitment dominated his life.

He walked with the Lord daily and years ago shared the secret with me in a poem by Ralph S. Crisman.

*I met God in the morning  
When the day was at its best,  
And His presence came like sunrise  
Like a glory in my breast*

*All day long the presence lingered  
All day long He stayed with me;  
And we sailed in perfect calmness  
O'er a very troubled sea.*

*Other ships were blown and battered,  
Other ships were sore distressed;  
But the winds that seemed to drive them  
Brought to us a peace and rest.*

*So I think I know the secret  
Learned from many a troubled way;  
You must seek Him in the morning  
If you want Him through the day.*

Brother John walked with God these 90 years and the Lord grew more precious to him with every passing day.

### **Seeing God**

Finally, great men walk confidently toward eternity. He knew in whom he believed (The Lord Jesus) and was persuaded he was able to keep that which he had committed unto him (his souls salvation) until that day.

A boy and an old man, sitting on a dock in the late afternoon fishing, talked about many things — why sunsets are red, why rain falls, why seasons change, what life is like. Finally, the boy looked at the old man, as the old man was baiting his hook for him, and asked, “Does anybody ever see God?”. “Son,,” said the old man, looking across the blue water, “it’s getting so that I can hardly see anything else.”

The longer he lived, I believe, the more clearly Brother John saw the Lord and heaven.

Someone said, “A tree is best measured when it is down.” Measured by any standard, John Wright was a great man—great in his love, great in his humanness, and great in his faith. I recently preached a Pisano with Dr. Jack MacGorman, a long time professor of New Testament at

Southwestern Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas. As a young man he rebelled against his preacher father and ran away from home. God caught up with him in Austin, turned his life around and he too became a minister. Thereafter he and his dad became the closest of friends. When he returned for his father's funeral years later, the minister having delivered the eulogy came to the end of the sermon. In a matter of fact way, almost as if he were presiding over a church business meeting said, "I hereby pronounce the transfer of Rev. John MacGorman's membership from Calvary Baptist Church to the Church Eternal whose maker and builder is God." I want to make that same pronouncement today. "I hereby pronounce the transfer of Dr. John M. Wright's membership from First Baptist Church, Pineville, Louisiana to the Church Eternal, whose maker and builder is God."

For many years Brother John used a poem at funerals entitled "Should You Go First" by Albert Kennedy Rowsell. He and Hellon had agreed that they would use this poem at the funeral service of whichever one went first. It is, I believe, a fitting way to close this service today.

The poem begins with the writer remembering the happy days they had known, the helping hands they had received, and the hope that death could not destroy.

Then it concludes:

*Should you go first and I remain  
One thing I'd have you do;  
Walk slowly down the path of death,  
For soon I'll follow you.  
I'll want to know each step you take  
That I may walk the same,  
For some day down that lonely road  
You'll hear me call your name.*

**Note:** Seven months later Hellon, who had been in perfect health, followed him in death.

# Chapter 3

## Living Wisely

*Funeral Service of One Who Died Suddenly*  
*Alan Johnson*

**TEXT: Psalm 90:12**

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*I doubt if I  
ever had a  
truer friend  
than Alan  
Johnson. He  
was a  
confidant and  
inspiration  
when I needed  
it most. His  
sudden death  
brought to  
mind this  
verse: "So  
teach us to  
number our  
days than we  
may apply our  
hearts unto  
wisdom." (Ps  
90:12)*

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Through the years I have made a practice of writing a group of friends periodically just to let them know how much they meant to me. Four years ago I found a poem that I printed and sent to these special people. Alan was one of them. The poem read:

*Around the corner I have a friend,  
In this great city that has no end;  
Yet days go by, and weeks rush on,  
And before I know it a year is gone.  
And I never see my old friend's face  
For life is a swift and terrible race.*

*He knows I like him just as well  
As in the days when I rang his bell  
And he rang mine. We were  
younger then,  
And now we are busy, tired men:  
Tired with playing a foolish game,  
Tired with trying to make a name.*

*“Tomorrow,” I say, “I will call on Jim,  
Just to show that I’m thinking of him.”  
But tomorrow comes — and tomorrow goes,  
And the distance between us grows and grows.*

*Around the corner! — yet miles away . . .  
“Here’s a telegram, Sir . . . Jim died today.”  
And that’s what we get, and deserve in the end:  
Around the corner, a vanished friend.*

—Unknown

I have come today to say “good-bye,” at least for a little while, to a vanished friend. I doubt if I ever had a truer friend than Alan Johnson. In one of the darkest hours of my life, I needed someone who would help me who would be understanding and accepting. There are many people I could have turned to, but Alan was the first I thought of. In a time when I needed a friend most, he was there.

A young woman, going through a divorce, came to me for help. She did not have money for a lawyer. I told her to go to Alan. I knew he would treat her right. When the divorce was over she never received a bill.

One of our women called me Friday night to tell me she went on a mission trip to Belize years ago. Before she left she wanted to update her will and went to Alan for help. When she asked what it would cost, he replied, “This is my contribution to your missionary journey.”

Alan and I first met on first base in a church league softball game. He was playing for Calvary, the defending state champions. I was the new preacher at Green Acres Baptist Church. He hit a single and I was playing first base. He said I shoved him off first base. You know that is not true! The rivalry between us was such that if I had it would

have led to a free-for-all. Moreover, it would have been his fault.

Later, Alan, Mary Sue, and the children joined our church. Alan proved himself to be the kind of man we wanted as a deacon, and we ordained him. In time, his fellow deacons chose him to be their chairman. Through the years I had the joy of seeing the children grow up and then uniting all of them in marriage — Suzanne and David, Russ and Cammie, Kara and Andy.

I would never let Alan pay me for any of those weddings. I owed him too much already. I did tell him he could treat me to a golf game, but we never got around to it. He still owes me. Russ, that's a debt you will have to pay.

I returned to Dallas last Friday evening from attending meetings in Michigan, Ohio, and Iowa. As I drove from the airport to our home, for some unknown reason, I began to think about Alan and Mary Sue. When I walked in the house, Cathy said, "I've got bad news. Alan Johnson died this afternoon." The suddenness of his death brought to mind the verse, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

This prayer of Moses is set against the backdrop of the eternal nature of God and our transience. The Lord is "from everlasting to everlasting." In contrast our lives are like "a watch in the night" (the four hour shift of a soldier guarding a city) like a flood (a river that rises quickly and sweeps away everything in its path); and "like grass" (it grows in the morning and is cut down by the end of the day.). In light of the fact that God always has been and always will be, and that our lives are fleeting and transitory, he prays this prayer and urges us to do the same.

The sudden passing of anyone, especially a friend like Alan, reminds us of the shortness of life, the certainty of

death and the necessity of living wisely. In the light of these inescapable facts, we all should do some things.

- Enjoy our life fully
- Express our love freely
- Exercise our faith fervently

### **Enjoy Life**

First, the shortness of life and the certainty of death ought to remind us to enjoy life fully, i.e. make the most of every day. The psalmist wrote, “This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps. 118:24).

Too often we live our lives on an expectancy basis. We are always going to be happy when and if something else happens. Then someone suddenly dies and we realize that we must seize and squeeze every moment to its fullest.

We need to be like Robert Hastings, who wrote an essay entitled, “The Station.” In it he pictured life as a journey on a train and its destination is the station. He wrote, “If I had my life to live over, I’d stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles so much. Instead, I would climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefooted more often, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, and cry less. I have learned that life must be lived as we go along. The final station will come soon enough.”

### **Express Love**

Second, the shortness of life and the certainty of death ought to remind us to express our love freely. I determined a long time ago, I may not leave much in this world, but I did not want to leave without people knowing how I feel about them. Unashamedly and unapologetically I love people and feel deeply about them. I want them to know that before I am gone.

Obviously I am not the only person who feels this way. Recently, Jacque & Morris Gary sent me a poem I treasure. It is entitled "Do It Now" by Maj. John B. Jeffery. When Jacque's mother died in 1962, she found the newspaper clipping of this poem in her belongings. She had it for many years, for it had yellowed even then.

*If with pleasure you are viewing  
any work a man is doing,  
If you like him or you love him  
tell him now.  
Don't withhold your approbation  
till the parson makes oration,  
And he lies with snowy lilies  
o're his brow;*

*For no matter how you shout it,  
he won't really care about it;  
He won't know how many teardrops  
you have shed.  
If you think some praise is due him,  
now's the time to slip it to him,  
For he cannot read his tombstone when he's dead.*

*More than fame and more than money,  
is the comment kind and sunny,  
And the hearty, warm approval  
of a friend,  
For it give to life a savor, and  
it makes you stronger, braver,  
And it gives you heart and  
spirit to the end.*

*If he earns your praise, bestow it;  
if you like him, let him know it;  
Let the words of true encouragement  
be said.*

*Do not wait till life is over, and  
he's underneath the clover,  
For he cannot read his tombstone  
when he's dead.*

That is the kind of thing we all should do.

Dean Edwards wrote a song for the “Make Today Count” organization, a group devoted to improving the quality of life for the terminally ill and their families during their remaining time together. The song expresses the truth we all need to heed:

*If I had just twenty-four hours for living,  
the things that don't matter could wait.  
I'd play with the children,  
hear all of their stories,  
I'd tell you I love you before it's too late.*

### **Exercise Faith**

Third, the shortness of life and the certainty of death ought to remind us to exercise our faith fervently. Cannon Henry Twills has written a poem entitled, “On a Cathedral Clock.” It goes like this:

*When as a child, I laughed and wept,  
time crept.  
When, as a youth, I waxed more bold,  
time strolled.*

*When I became a full-grown man,  
time ran.  
When older still I daily grew,  
time flew.  
Soon I shall find, in passing on,  
time gone.  
Oh, Christ, will Thou have saved me then?  
Amen.*

The crucial question of time and eternity is this: “When Christ comes or when we go in death, will we be saved?” In the final analysis, little else really matters.

Jesus tells us how we can be sure. After announcing his own death he said, “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

If you forget all else I say here today, do not miss this — Jesus is the way to God. Not “a” way. He is “the” way.

We sang earlier in the service, “When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be.” But, make no mistake about it; not everyone is going to heaven. Only those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ will get there.

Alan would want me to say to you today, “Give your life to the Savior and then meet him in heaven.”



# Chapter 4

## Learning Life's Greatest Lessons

*Funeral Service for a Dedicated Deacon  
Bob Floyd*

**TEXT: II Timothy 4:6-8**

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*Bob Floyd was an exemplary Christian gentleman and outstanding church statesman. I wish every pastor could have had Bob as their deacon chairman. He was warm, friendly, optimistic and encouraging to all those with whom he came in contact.*

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The day before yesterday Kyle Keeter, Bob's son-in-law, took his children aside, Collin age 5 and Leah age 3, to explain to them that their grandfather had died and would not be with them anymore.

As Kyle tried to explain death so they could understand it, Collin said, "I have a question. What can we do for Bop?" (Bob wanted the grandchildren to call him Pop. Everyone else called him Bob. So they put the two together and called him Bop.)

Collin then answered his own question, "I know, we can pray." Kyle replied, "Yes, we can pray."

Leah then said, "I have a question. Will Mimi, Susan and the puppy dog live forever?"

Kyle then explained that while

they were healthy now, everyone dies eventually.

Collin spoke again. He said, “I know what else we can do for Bob. We can still love him.” The proverb is true, out of the mouths of babes come words of wisdom.

We have come together today to say to Bob, “In spite of death, we still love you. And, we love Martha, the children, and all your family as well.”

There are lots of reasons why we love Bob Floyd. Let me name three of them for you. We love Bob because:

- He taught us how to live;
- He taught us how to love;
- He taught us how to leave.

These are things we all need to know - and death reminds us of them.

### **How to Live**

First, we need to know how to live. I have known Bob and Martha for over forty years. When I became pastor of my first full-time church, in Troy, Texas in 1956, I moved next door to Mattie Edwards, Martha’s widowed mother. It was not long thereafter that Bob and Martha came home to visit. From the first time I met Bob he was the warmest, friendliest, most optimistic, and encouraging person I had ever known. He made me think I was already the greatest preacher in the world and destined to get better. Chances are he made some of you feel that good about yourself also.

Bob enjoyed the simple things of life — his family, his friends, his faith. They were enough to satisfy him.

How do you explain a beautiful and good life like Bob’s? A part of it is due to the home from which he came. His mother and father and all the other relatives and friends who touched his life helped to make him what he was. However, the single most important thing is that early in

his life he met and committed his life to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the promised one of scripture. He trusted him as his savior, he walked with him as his friend and he served him as his Lord.

Christ can change any life. He changed Bob's and he can change yours. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." Until we meet Christ we merely exist. After we meet him we discover what real life is. Bob made that discovery and thus he taught us how to live.

### **How to Love**

Second, we need to know how to love. Bob taught us that too. Several years ago I visited St. Johns Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia. It is the oldest church in Richmond, founded in 1741. It is the church where on March 23, 1775 Patrick Henry made his passionate plea before the Virginia convention. "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

The oldest grave in the cemetery that surrounds the little church is that of Robert Rose, the first rector of the church. His epitaph read:

*"In his friendship he was warm and steady. In his manner he was gentle and easy; in his conversation he was entertaining and instructive. With the most tender piety he discharged all the domestic duties of husband, father, son, and brother. In short, he was a friend of the whole human race."*

That was Bob.

In the made-for-television movie, “True Women,” Sarah, whose husband had been killed by Indians and who had already lost two children to death, was now preparing to bury her last son, who was killed in the Civil War. She said, “I don’t think our loved ones make our lives, but loving them does.”

Bob made our lives, and thus his own by his love. More than that, he witnessed to Christ who said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples... if you have love one to another.” (John 13:35)

If, when a man comes to the end of his life, he has a few friends to carry him to his place of burial, he is fortunate indeed. But look around at this vast crowd here today. It is the largest I have ever seen at any funeral. It is a testimony to the fact that Bob was a friend to the whole human race.

### **How to Leave**

Third, we need to know how to leave. Bob taught us that also. Perhaps you saw the movie, *Forest Gump*. If so, you will remember that Forest’s mother was dying she said to him, “Death is a part of life.”

Years later Forest’s wife, Jenny, died. As he stood at her grave he said to himself, “Mama always said dying was a part of life. I sure wish it wasn’t.”

For 45 years I have walked and wept with people through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is a part of life. I wish it was not. However, it is, and we had best prepare for it. That is why we need to learn how to leave.

The relationship of Joy Davidman and C.S. Lewis has been celebrated in books and film. It lasted only a short time, but greatly impacted Lewis’ life. When Joy died, her last words were, “I am at peace with God.” Lewis later recalled her death by saying, “She smiled, but not at me.”

That's the way Bob died - at peace and smiling. He left with dignity, and grace, and confidence. In so doing he taught us not only how to live and how to love, but how to leave.

For more than 20 years Bob taught Floyd's Faithfuls Sunday school classes in this church. It was made up of all ages and all classes of people. Some of them are beyond 80 years of age. At least five of them have cancer. And they are seated here at the front as a group. Let me just say to them, "Bob expects all of you to be in Sunday school tomorrow morning."

To our knowledge, in all these years, Bob is the first one in the class to die. At the funeral home the other night Jon White remarked, "That's just like Bob. He would have to be the first one to go. And when we get there, he will be standing at the gate to greet us."

Bob had a thousand homespun Arkansas sayings. One he liked to use, when time was running short was, "It's time to tie a bow around this." If he could speak today I think he would say, "Paul that's enough. It's time to tie a bow around this."

So, let me close by reading the testimony of the apostle Paul as he came to the end of his life. I believe it could well be Bob's testimony also.

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure (death) is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

That is how we should all live and love and leave. Amen!  
And Amen!



# Chapter 5

## What Is Your Life?

*Funeral Service for an Old Friend*

*Robert M. Rogers*

**TEXT: James 4:13-17**

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*Bob Rogers  
was my close  
friend for  
more than 30  
years. From  
the first time I  
met him, I  
knew our  
friendship  
would grow.  
We were a  
kindred spirit.*

*His legacy  
was "Don't  
leave God out  
of your life.  
Live with a  
conscious  
dependence  
on him."*

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I once read, "It takes a long time to grow an old friend."

Today I have come to say good-bye to an old friend. When my family and I moved to Tyler in 1972, Bob and his family widened the circle of their friendship and took us in. I immediately felt a closeness to Bob. We were of a kindred spirit.

In the 25 years that followed we walked together, worked together, wept together and worshipped together. In those early days, when his business was smaller and my church responsibilities less demanding, I often dropped by his office in the afternoons just to visit with him. I talked to him about church problems and he talked with me about business problems.

Sometimes I flew with him to visit some of his systems. On one occasion we made a two-week trip

to jungles of Brazil in the Amazon Valley. It was a memorable trip for both of us.

One day Bob told me he and his family had once been members of Sylvania Baptist Church. I told him I had preached a revival there in 1956. At that time the church met in a small white stucco building on the Henderson Highway. The pastor and deacons strung lights on poles in front of the church, moved chairs outside, and for a week conducted an outdoor revival meeting. I kept records in those days and that week, I told Bob; there was only one profession of faith. I felt the week had been a failure. He replied, "Well, I'll be. That was the time when I made my profession of faith. I was that man."

That was 41 years ago. Bob was 30 years of age and I was only 22. Neither one of us dreamed our paths would cross again or that this day would ever come.

In the years that have followed, I buried his son, Robbie, and his mother, Pearl. In addition, he became one of my greatest supporters and encouragers.

He was a gracious and gentleman. I never heard him say an unkind word about anyone. He subscribed to the philosophy that little men discuss people; ordinary men discuss events; and great men discuss ideas. Bob liked to discuss ideas.

We know of his generosity. He gave millions to Baylor University, East Texas Baptist University, Tyler Junior College, the University of Texas at Tyler, and All Saints School. However, for me his generosity took a more personal turn. One day he called and asked me to meet him for lunch. When I sat down he handed me some papers and asked me to sign them. He and his family had established a \$100,000 scholarship fund at Baylor University in my name. All I needed to do was to sign the agreement. Every year

since that time I have received several letters from students who were recipients of that scholarship. They thanked me, but they were really thanking me for what Bob and his family did.

Two years ago Bob learned he had a growth in his colon. He asked me to lunch again. This time we discussed spiritual things. Especially his salvation. Then he replied, "I'm ready to go. And when the time comes, I want you to conduct my service." So, I am here today to do the last thing I can do for my friend Bob Rogers.

His illness has been long and difficult. There comes a time when a sick man needs to die, like a tired man needs to rest. Bob needed to die. Death in his case came as an angel of mercy.

I have been asking myself in these last few days, "What would Bob want me to say to you?" I think I can sum it up in two sentences. He would want me to say, "Don't leave God out of your life. Live with a conscious dependence on him."

The scriptures teach that in James 4:13-17. There are good reasons for that admonition. Let me share three of them with you today:

- Tomorrow is a mystery
- Life is a mist
- God is the Master

### **The Future is Uncertain**

First, we must not leave God out of our lives because tomorrow is a mystery. As James writes, "We know not what shall be on the morrow." God has given us the amazing ability to look back and remember. However, we have no ability to see into the future. We do not know what shall be a year from now or a month from now or a week from now

or even one hour from now.

That is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because if we knew the future we might be so gripped with terror that we could not enjoy the meantime. But, if it is a blessing, it is also a curse. It means we dare not delay. We must not put off until tomorrow what ought to be done today.

The writer of Proverbs warned, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow for no man knows what one day may bring forth.” One day may bring forth an automobile accident as it did with Princess Diana, or a heart attack as it did with Mother Teresa, or a bad biopsy report as it did with Bob. The future is a mystery. We just cannot know what shall be on the morrow.

### **Life is Fleeting**

Second, we must not leave God out of our lives because life is like a morning mist. James asked, “What is your life?” Then he answered his own question. “It is a vapor (literally a breath or a mist) that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.” Go out on a cold morning and when the warmth of your breath meets the coldness of the air a vapor is formed. However, it vanishes almost as fast as it appears. That is a graphic reminder of how fleeting life is.

Several years ago I preached a revival at First Baptist Tyler. I quoted Tony Campolo who said, “Life was better when we measured time by the hourglass instead of the watch. A watch gives the illusion that time goes on and on and on. The hourglass reminds us that time is running out.” Bob was there that day and left the service visibly moved. With tears in his eyes he said to me, “I’m like that hourglass. Time is running out for me.” It is for us too.

Omar Khayyam hit the nail on the head: “The Bird of

Time has but a little way to flutter - and the Bird is on the Wing.”

### **God is Sovereign**

Finally, we must not leave God out of our lives because he alone is the master. James reminds us that we ought not to make our plans as though we were the captain of our fate or the master of our soul. What we ought rather to say is, “If God wills, I will do this or that.” Man proposes but God disposes.

John Chancellor, at the age of 67, was just settling into retirement after 43 years as a broadcast journalist. We saw him often on the NBC Nightly News. He said there was not a cloud in his sky. Everything in his life looked rosy. Then he discovered he had cancer of the stomach. At first he was angry with God and with himself. In time he made peace with both. Just before his death he made this statement, “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.”

The future is uncertain. Life is fleeting. God is sovereign. Therefore, we dare not leave him out of our lives. We ought to live with a conscious dependence on him.

Last year I returned to a former pastorate to conduct a revival meeting. Following one of the services a woman reminded me that during my years as pastor I had tried to win her to faith in Christ. She was indifferent to spiritual things at the time, but then circumstances changed and she turned her life over to the Lord. She thanked me for being concerned about her soul and planting the seed of faith in her life. Then she said, “I wasted so many years.” I replied to her, “Yes, but you haven’t wasted them all.” That is the case with some of you. You may have wasted

many years, but you have not wasted them all yet. It's not too late to put your faith and trust in Christ and to live with a conscious dependence on God.

If you will do that, you will live and die a better person. That's what Bob would want me to tell you.

# Chapter 6

## A Time For All Things

*Funeral Sermon of a Faithful Steward  
Earl Clem*

**TEXT: Ecc. 3:1-11**

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*Every church needs an Earl Clem. When we had a building program, Earl would accuse me of taking the money he had saved for a new fishing boat and motor.*

*Earl understood and lived a life of Christian stewardship. He was generous with all that he had. Most of all he was humble. He gave because he loved.*

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When Jean called last week to tell me Earl had gone from bad to worse, I was laid up in bed, flat on my back, recovering from surgery on both feet. She reminded me Earl had asked and I had promised to preach his funeral when the time came. There was no way I could have come at that time, so I secretly prayed Earl would live until Sunday.

Sunday night it became evident Earl would not live through the next day, so Jean told him I might not be able to come. He said to her, "You get on the phone and tell him he got my boat and motor and all my money, so get himself a pair of house shoes and get on down here and preach my funeral."

Earl was referring to the fact that at the church we were in so many building programs while I was his pastor and I always had so many

programs going that every time he saved up enough money for a special fishing boat he wanted, I ended up getting it for the church. So for ten years now he has been accusing me of getting his boat and motor.

That is not all Earl said. He told Jean, “Just put me in a pine box. No flowery speeches. I do not want people wondering who it is up there in that box. Tell him to preach to the people that are there, and keep it short.”

Now, isn't that just like Earl? He asks me to do a job and then tells me how to do it.

Earl, you know, was a good man, a good steward, and a good friend. He loved Jean, and she loved him with all her heart. He loved his children, David, Denise, Katherine, and Mark. In addition, how he loved his grandchildren, Chester, Jimmy, Jessica, and Rebecca. Moreover, he loved his church. However, most of all, he loved God.

One of Earl's favorite passages of scripture was Ecclesiastes 3:1-11. It reads: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace . . . He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world (eternity) in their heart . . .” (Ecc. 3:1-8, 11).

These words were penned by Solomon, the wisest man

who ever lived. He had, by the time he wrote this, tasted of most of what life had to offer - the bitter as well as the sweet; the bad as well as the good. All of his expressions served to solidify his conviction that the sovereign hand of God guided the affairs of men.

So these verses speak to us of the importance of time and of timing. They remind us that behind the universe is a God who has a plan, a design for all things. They say that life is not haphazard. It is not, as Shakespeare wrote, “A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury that signifies nothing.”

Behind time is the God of time, who has carefully marked out all things. There is a rhythm to life that we can find and cooperate with. We can get in step with God.

Of course, we do not have to cooperate with God. The scriptures say, “There is a time to die . . .” But we can hasten that by foolish or careless acts. Moreover, in other areas we do not have to stay in step with God’s timing. However, when we do, we will be living life as God intended it to be.

Realizing that God has a time for all things does three things for us:

- It gives life a sense of excitement
- It gives life a sense of urgency
- It gives life a sense of confidence

### **Get in Step with God**

First, realizing God has a time for all things gives life a sense of excitement. It is exciting to realize there is something beyond us, that God has a vast plan and purpose we can all be a part of.

Someone has said, “Christ is like a pencil sharpener. He gives my life a point.” Without him life has no meaning. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury but

signifying nothing. With him it has both purpose and significance. God is going somewhere. He is on schedule. And we can go with him. The challenge of life is to not run ahead of God; not lag behind God; but walk beside him.

### **A Redemption Point**

Second, realizing God has a time for all things gives life a sense of urgency. We must be ready when God's time comes. Jim Redding, a Baptist preacher from Cleveland, Ohio, and founder of the Helping Hands Halfway House has spent most of his life working with criminals. He came to this conclusion: There is in the life of every person "a redemption point" when they are most likely to turn their life around. If they miss that moment, they will probably never change at all.

Shakespeare put in the mouth of Julius Caesar these words:

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."*

### **You Can't Fail**

Third, realizing God has a time for all things gives life a sense of confidence. If we fit in with God's plan and God's timing, we are bound to succeed. We cannot fail, for we are binding ourselves to him.

Earl would have me remind you, there is not only a time to be born and a time to die; not only a time to sow and a time to reap; not only a time to laugh and a time to cry; but there is also a time to be saved. And when the flood tide of

God's spirit comes in, you must be ready to respond.

The apostle Paul witnessed to Felix, the governor. Felix was deeply moved by Paul's message. But, instead of saying "yes" to Christ, he said, "Go thy way, I will call for you at a more convenient season." So far as we know, that time never came. The tide went out and Felix was left on the mud flats of eternity.

The little book, *Tuesdays With Morrie* is the story of an old man, Morrie Schwartz, a young man, Mitch Albom and life's greatest lessons. Morrie Schwartz was for many years a teacher at Brandise University. He contracted ALS - Lou Gehrig's disease which is a slow and painful way to die. But Morrie determined he would not be ashamed of death. He would face it bravely and triumphantly.

While being interviewed by Ted Koppel one of Morrie's former students, Mitch Albom, who wrote the book, saw the interview and reestablished relations with his old and treasured teacher. They met together on Tuesdays and discussed life and death.

In one of the interviews Morrie said to Mitch, "Everyone knows they're going to die but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently."

"So we kid ourselves about death," he said.

"Yes, But there's a better approach. To know you're going to die, and to be prepared for it at anytime. That's better. That way you'll actually be more involved in your life while you're living."

"How can you ever be prepared to die?"

Then he offered this suggestion. "Have a little bird on your shoulder that asks, 'Is today the day? Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be?'"

He turned his head to his shoulder as if the bird were

there now.

“Is today the day I die?” He said.

Earl would remind us today, “There is a time to die” and no one is really ready to die until they trust the One who lives forever - Jesus Christ, God’s Son. When we come to him in simple trust he gives to us his life - abundant now, eternal then. And since there is a time for all things it is urgent that we do that today - while we can.

# Chapter 7

## A Woman to Remember

*Funeral Service of a Community Servant*

*Ruth Reynolds*

**TEXT: Acts 9:36**

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*Ruth Reynolds was a modern Dorcas. Charm and grace exuded from her persona. At age 100, she was still elegant. You could quickly discern her love and devotion for the Lord.*

*She believed that one of her called ministries was to support the pastor. She not only liked preachers, but she liked preachers' wives too.*

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We are here today to pay tribute to and to celebrate the life of a remarkable lady, one of Tyler's most outstanding citizens, Mrs. Smith Reynolds. When I became interim pastor of First Baptist Church fifteen months ago, Ruth was the first person to write me. She wanted me to visit her at her home when I had opportunity. She was the kind of person who wanted to know her pastor, even if he was just an interim.

When I arrived, I met one of the most charming and gracious women I have ever known. Moreover, she was still elegant at the age of 99.

It did not take long for her to let me know of her deep devotion to Christ and her love for her church. She wanted me to bring my wife to visit her the next time. She not only liked preachers, she liked preacher's wives. So one day Cathy and I made

another enjoyable visit to her home.

Shortly before Christmas Ruth called and asked me to visit her again. She had something for me. It was a new suit; in fact, it is the one I am wearing today. It was her custom to give the preacher a suit every Christmas. That, of course, is what you are supposed to do. I think that is in the Bible. If it is not, it ought to be.

She told me she would celebrate her 100th birthday December 31. I told her I would be there. And what a celebration it was! Smith and Jim, you did it up right. She was so happy that day and she was so proud of you.

I really think the prospects of her 100th birthday kept her alive. Shortly after that she was hospitalized. I visited her in the hospital and even while I was there Smith called to check up on her. Both of you boys were so attentive to your mother and she was so appreciative of both of you.

I have tried to imagine the changes Ruth saw over her 100-year life span, since her birth in 1896.

- She saw traveling change from riding horseback and wagon to the space shuttle.
- She saw us move from traveling at a speed of 25 miles a day to 25,000 miles an hour.
- She saw Texas move from mud roads to interstate highways.
- She saw communications change from the telegraph to television and the Internet.
- She saw us move from one-room schools to great universities.
- She saw us move from country doctors to county medical centers.

She probably saw more change in her lifetime than had occurred in the previous 5,000 years. In a sense, therefore, her passing marks not just the end of a life, but the end of

an era.

In the midst of all these changes, one thing remained constant with Ruth. That was her love for and commitment to Christ and his church. In that respect, she reminds me of another woman, a woman in the Bible named Dorcas. The scriptures tell us that she was a disciple of Jesus whose life was full of good works and almsdeeds (gifts to the poor). And when she died the widows she had helped gathered around her bedside, weeping, holding in their hands garments she had sewed for them.

Someone remembered that Simon Peter was in nearby Joppa and sent for him. When he arrived and saw this dear lady dead, he knelt by her bedside, prayed for her, then reached out and took her hand, and lifted her up and presented her alive and well.

Word spread throughout the whole area and many came to believe in the Lord because of this.

Ruth and Dorcas were alike and great women in at least three ways. They were disciples; their lives were filled with good works and almsdeeds; they left behind a legacy of service; and they experienced new life in Christ. In short, they believed something; they achieved something; and they received something. Those things are important in the lives of all of us and Ruth's passing reminds us that:

- We ought to believe something
- We ought to achieve something
- We ought to receive something

### **A Simple Faith**

First, the life of Ruth like the life of Dorcas reminds us that we ought to believe something. Dorcas was a disciple. So was Ruth. The name "disciple" is one of five words in the Bible used to describe the followers of Christ. They are

called believers, brethren, servants, saints, and disciples. They are called believers for their faith; brethren for their love; servants for their work; saints for their holiness; and disciples for their knowledge.

Like Dorcas, Ruth knew Christ as her savior. In fact, as the world changed and became more complicated, I think her faith in Christ became more settled and simple. Another Reynolds I know, Dr. Herbert H. Reynolds, Chancellor of Baylor University, had bypass surgery several years ago. He said through that experience his mind kept going back to the simple faith he had learned at his mother's knee. The bedrock was: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Folks, you cannot get any more profound than that. Here is a man with a keen intellect who led a great university with grace and dignity for many years. And when his faith was distilled by the thoughts of death, he came back to this simple truth: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

That was Ruth's faith also.

### **Everything Good and Worthwhile**

Second, Ruth, like Dorcas achieved something. Dorcas' life was filled with good works and almsdeeds. Her faith was no mere mental ascent to theological precepts. She acted on what she believed. The same was true of Ruth. She was active in her church. She served as a hospital volunteer in Old Camp Fanning in World War II. She was active in the Red Cross, the University of Texas in Tyler, and the University of Texas Health Center. In fact, whatever was good and worthwhile, Ruth Reynolds was for. That was a part of what made Ruth so beautiful.

A dear old Quaker lady, distinguished for her youthful

look, was asked what she used to preserve her appearance. She replied sweetly, “I use for the lips, truth; for the voice, prayer; for the eyes, pity; for the hand charity; for the figure, uprightness; and for the heart, love.”

Someone said, “A noble character is the sum of many ordinary days well used.” That was Ruth’s secret. She used her ordinary days well and thus she left a legacy of leadership, of service and of good will that will live on beyond this day.

### **Receive New Life in Christ**

Third, Ruth, like Dorcas received something. Dorcas was raised from the dead by the hand of the apostle Peter. This was a resuscitation because she would still die again in the future.

In a way different but just as real, Ruth has received new life in Christ and with Christ. There is no apostle here today to kneel by her casket, to take her hand, and to lift her to her feet. However, one day our Lord will come again and he will reach out his hand to her, and he will lift her up and resurrect her to new life. Ruth shall live again.

I once read, “In order to be heaven-bound, we must be heaven-born.” Both are true of Ruth. She was heaven-born. She is heaven-bound.

So, Ruth, we salute you today! You lived well and you died well. You believed something. You achieved something. You received something. Moreover, we are all the better for it.



# Chapter 8

## A Teacher Sent From God

*The Funeral of a Good Teacher*  
*Mildred Stewart*

**TEXT: Titus 2:1-5**

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*Mildred Stewart came from a family of preachers. If you asked any of her family members who was the best preacher, chances are they would have said "Mildred is."*

*She knew more chapters and verses of scripture than any one I have ever known.*

*Her legacy as a Sunday school and Bible teacher: "she was a teacher sent by God."*

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G. Campbell Morgan, the great Bible expositor from England had five sons who were all preachers. On the occasion of a family gathering, someone asked, "Which of you six is the best preacher?"

Without a moment's hesitation, they all turned toward the kitchen where Mrs. Morgan was preparing the evening meal and said, "She is."

Mildred Stewart comes from a family of preachers. Billy and Donald Tisdale have together preached more than ninety years. Chances are, if you asked anyone in that family who was the best preacher, they would say without hesitation, "Mildred is."

If Mildred had been Roman Catholic, she would have been Mother Superior. She was both tough and tender. She could be rigid and she could be redemptive at the

same time. Like a prophet of old, everything was either black or white to Mildred. With her, there were no opinions, everything was a conviction.

Most of all, Mildred was a teacher. Every mother and grandmother ought to be. That is the thrust of my text. Mildred taught her children and she taught her grandchildren. However, beyond that, wherever she went, she gathered around her a group of women who loved her and who learned from her. Someone said, “The best way to teach character is to have it around the house.” Mildred not only was a character, she had character and she taught character. She taught not only by what she said but also by how she lived. It was said of Jesus, “We know that thou art a teacher sent from God.” The same could be said of Mildred. Mildred taught us three things - three things every teacher needs to teach:

- She taught us to treasure the scriptures
- She taught us to triumph over sorrow
- She taught us to trust the Savior

### **The Book**

First, Mildred, like all good teachers, taught us to love the scriptures. When Sir Walter Scott lay dying, turning to his beloved Lockhart, he said in his Scottish dialect: “Lockhart, reach me the book.”

“What book?”, asked his friend.

Then the man whose genius has produced the poetic beauty of *Ivanhoe* and many other worthy pieces of literature, declared, “There is but one book for a dying man. That book is the Bible. Reach me the book.”

For Mildred, in life and in death, there was but one book - the Holy Scriptures, God’s inspired word.

A young man preaching said, “God said it; I believe it;

that settles it.” After he had finished, an older man, a retired preacher, put his arm around him and complemented him on his sermon. Then he said, “Young man, I liked your sermon . . . but let me make one correction. God said it and that settles it. It doesn’t matter if you believe it or not.”

As far as Mildred was concerned, if God said it, that settled it. However, she also believed it.

She read it through, prayed it in, and live it out. My wife said that she believed Mildred knew more chapters and verses than any other person she had ever met.

Isaiah wrote, “The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of God endures forever.” (Isaiah 40:8) In a day of moral confusion, it is the one book we need to know. Mildred taught us to love the Bible and that is one of the reasons we loved her.

### **Acquainted With Sorrow**

Second, Mildred like all good teachers taught us to triumph over sorrow. The scriptures say of Jesus “He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.” Mildred was acquainted with grief sorrow also. She lost a son, Ronnie. She lost her husband. She lost her grandson Eric. In addition, she lost her daughter Eleanor. However, she never lost her faith or her hope.

Someone has said that Christians are like tea bags, not worth much until they have been through some hot water. Mildred had been through plenty of hot water and from the crucible of grief and loss she taught us how to live with sorrow.

A Chinese woman’s only son died. In great anguish she went to a holy man. “What magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?” She asked. He answered her question with a request. “Fetch me a mustard

seed from a home that has never known sorrow, and we will use the seed to drive the sorrow out of your life.”

The woman set off at once to search for such a mustard seed. She came first to a mansion of an obviously wealthy family. “Surely,” she said to herself, “This a home that has never known sorrow.” She knocked on the door and was greeted by a woman whose face revealed long nights of endless tears.

“I’m looking for a home that has never known sorrow,” the visitor said.

“You’ve come to the wrong house” responded the matron, “For I have just gone through terrible sorrow. Come in, and I will tell you about it.”

As they conversed, the visitor learned that the other woman had also lost a son. Therefore, she stayed to comfort her.

Soon the visitor continued her search for a home that had never known sorrow. However, wherever she went, in mansions or in hovels, she discovered one experience after another of sadness and misfortune. She eventually became so involved in ministering to the grief of others that she forgot her own sorrow.

It was the same with Mildred. She never let her sorrow get her down lower than her knees. She not only taught us to love the scriptures, she taught us to live with sorrow.

### **The Life Beyond**

Finally, Mildred like all good teachers taught us to trust the Savior. Because of her knowledge of the scriptures, she knew that heaven was a land of no sighing, no crying, no dying . . . and no goodbying. In addition, she knew the way there was through faith in Christ. He was and is the way, the truth and the life. Moreover, no one comes to the Father

except by him.

He is the truth - without him there is no knowing. He is the life - without him there is no growing. He is the way - without him there is no going.

So with the eye of faith Mildred looked to heaven. Charles and Ottie Arrington, from the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, served as missionary associates in Athens, Greece where he was pastor of the International Baptist Church. Charles enjoyed introducing friends to new experiences so one day he took a man who had never seen the ocean to see it. As they stood on the shore, he asked the man, "What do you think?" The man replied, "It's not as big as I thought it would be."

I can almost imagine Mildred's response if someone in heaven should ask her, "Mildred, what do you think?" Her reply would probably be, "It's far bigger and better and more wonderful than I ever preached of thought or taught."

*They draw me to them: women who have grown  
Wise with the wisdom that right living brings.  
Older mothers who have suffered and have known  
A triumph over many conquered things  
Who have grown gently, trusting day by day  
Who have grown patient, serving through the  
years;  
Who, have prayed much, have learned how to  
pray  
And weeping - learned how futile were their tears.  
They wear such certainty within their eyes:  
A sureness that no questioning can shake;  
The way was made so plain that they should take -  
If one should come to them - his faith grown dim  
Their faith would light the fires anew in him.*

Martha Franks had a dear friend and coworker, Olive Lawton. They served together in China and lived in the same retirement center when Martha died.

At the time Olive was very ill. She was in and out of consciousness. It was determined nevertheless that she should be told about Martha's death.

When she was told that Martha had died there was no response. Olive lay perfectly still without expression. Then she whispered, "Let's pray." Not knowing whether she wanted to pray or have a prayer offered, there was a pause. Then Olive voiced the prayer, "Lord, help Martha settle in."

That is our prayer for Mildred today. The last years of Mildred's life were difficult and she was not only ready to die, she was anxious to die. Therefore, this is in many ways her day of coronation. Now, dear Lord, help Mildred settle in.

# Chapter 9

## Happy, Healthy And At Home

*Funeral Sermon of Someone With An  
Extended Illness*

*Hunter Bell*

**TEXT: Revelation 14:13**

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*Hunter Bell  
was my barber,  
a member of  
my church and  
my friend for  
many years.  
For several  
months, he  
was forced to  
endure pain  
and illness.  
We don't  
understand  
why bad things  
happen to  
good people.  
We cannot  
trace the hand  
of God. We  
must trust the  
heart of God.*

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We have gathered today for the funeral service of Hunter Bell. Hunter, as you may know, was my barber, a member of my church, and my friend for many years. Most of you could say the same thing about him. He was a good man who loved God, loved his family, loved his friends, and loved life.

We do not understand much about life. Some people enjoy good health all the days of their life and others are forced to endure sickness. Some live long lives and some die young. One thing we do know, however, is that no matter what our lot in life, we are the Lord's and he loves us.

Hunter had a difficult time health-wise over the last months. Many times many of you asked Beulah and his family, "How is Hunter today?" I wonder if that question has crossed your mind this day? If so, let me

answer it for you this way:

- Hunter is healthy today;
- Hunter is happy today;
- Hunter is home today.

In addition, if we will put our faith and trust in Christ, the same can be said of us when the day of our death comes.

### **Almost Well**

First, when we trust Christ as Savior, death brings us health. So, Hunter is healthy today. Sickness and death are a part of the common lot of man. Both are indiscriminate in their attacks. We need to be reminded that neither was a part of God's original plan. They came about as a result of sin's entrance into the world.

How do we know this? Go back to the beginning. Apparently Adam and Eve were intended to live forever. Death came only after and as a part of the penalty of their disobedience (Gen. 3:19).

Then go to the end of time. The scriptures tell us that in heaven there will be no more tears, no more death, and no more pain (Rev. 21:4).

The apostle Paul clarifies the whole issue when he says, "Therefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; so death hath passed upon all men, for all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

Our hope of healing, of permanent health, then is heaven. Richard Baxter, a good and godly preacher spent his last several years in physical agony. His pain was intensified by the fact that he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. Shortly before his death a friend visited him. The friend pulled up a chair next to the bed of Richard and said to the great preacher, "Richard, how are you?" And Richard replied, "Friend, I'm almost well." And he died. Think of

that, “I’m almost well,” and he died.

So, you ask, “How is Hunter today?” And I reply, “He is well today.”

### **Happy and Fortunate**

Second, when we trust Christ as Savior, death brings us happiness. So, Hunter is happy today. John, in the Revelation, wrote, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

The word “blessed” literally means “fortunate, to be congratulated, to be happy.” Think of all the things we do in life to find happiness. Here we are told it is to be found in the most unlikely place, “in the Lord.” Even if you die as a follower of his, you enter into a state of blessedness. You find the ultimate joy and happiness for which most seek. So, you ask, “How is Hunter today?” And I reply, “He is happy today.”

### **The Father’s House**

Third, when we trust Christ as Savior, death takes us home. So, Hunter is home today. Is there any word that brings to mind more memories, more warm feelings, more satisfaction, than the word “home”? The older I get the more I realize how wonderful home is and the more I long to be there. Especially, I want to be home at night. Interestingly enough, the scriptures speak of heaven as our real home. Our true citizenship is in heaven. We are just pilgrims, aliens here on earth. (Phil. 3:20) Jesus, speaking of the life to come, said, “In my father’s house are many mansions (rooms): if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

The wonderful truth of the Bible is the moment we close our eyes in death we open them in glory if we are a Christian. So, remember, “Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Ps. 30:4-5). What happens in the morning? In the morning we will be healthy. In the morning we will be happy. In the morning we will be home.

That’s how Hunter is today.

# Chapter 10

## The Faith That Sustains

*Funeral Sermon of a Great Woman*  
*Glee McKay*

**TEXT: Romans 8:28-29**

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*Glee McKay was a person that I have known almost all my life. People in the community liked to refer to her as the Mrs. Christianity. Glee had a kind of enduring faith that sustained her throughout life. She trusted God completely. So should we.*

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Almost half of my life has been intertwined, in one way or another, with Glee and Judge Connally McKay. It started in 1965. I was pastor of First Baptist Church, Taylor, Texas, and preaching a revival meeting at First Baptist Church, Rockdale, Texas. Glee and Connally were traveling through Rockdale on Sunday morning and stopped to worship at First Baptist Church.

Green Acres was pastorless at the time so Connally recommended to the pulpit committee that they consider me. The committee decided I was too young, so they called another pastor and I moved to First Baptist Church, San Marcos.

Seven years later Green Acres was once again pastorless and once again Connally recommended to the search committee that they consider me.

When I moved to Tyler one of the first people I met was Tilson Maynard, associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Tyler. He said to me, “Connally McKay is Mr. Christianity in Tyler.” Frankly, I always thought that was a bit too much for the judge! Of course, you know, Glee called him “Angel.” And, I know that was a bit too much

But, if Connally was *Mr. Christianity*, and I really agree with that assessment, then Glee was *Mrs. Christianity*. And, if Connally is an angel, she was a special angel.

In my years as pastor at Green Acres I never had more supportive, encouraging, caring friends than they.

For the past several weeks Connally and Glee had been on my mind. Two weeks ago Cathy and I were in Tyler and I told her we needed to drop by and see how they were doing. I discovered, however, that they were in Victoria with Robert at the time. They continued to be on my mind and finally Sunday night I called Elaine only to discover that her mother had just died.

Glee’s favorite passage of scripture was Romans 8:28-29. It was also her father’s favorite. In fact, those were the last words he spoke before he died. The verses read, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

These verses are as important for what they do not say as for what they do say. The verses do not say that everything that happens is good — it isn’t; they do not say that God causes everything that happens — he doesn’t; and, they do not say that everything is going to turn out okay for everybody — it won’t.

What the verses say is that God is at work in the world

and especially in the lives of his children. His goal, his grand purpose, is to make us into the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ. And, to that end he can and does use all things — the good and the bad, that which he causes and that which he only allows. The verses say no experience has to be a total waste if we give it to God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great English preacher, must have had these verses in mind when he said, “God is too kind to be cruel; He is too wise to make a mistake; and when you cannot trace the hand of God you must trust the heart of God.”

I want you to hang on to that. It suggests the kind of faith that will sustain you in the valleys of life. Consider this

- God is too good to be cruel
- God is too wise to make a mistake
- God is too faithful to be doubted

### **God is Not Malicious**

First, God is too kind to be cruel. Over the marble fireplace in the mathematics building of Princeton University, written in original German is the scientific credo, “God is subtle, but he is not malicious.”

It is interesting that the word “subtle” comes from a Latin word that means “woven fine.” It also suggests that God is weaving a pattern in our lives, but it is often so fine, so minute, it is hard to make out what it is. But, it also says there is one thing we can be absolutely sure of, whatever God does is for our good. He is never malicious in his dealings with his children.

Paul speaks of God’s loving kindness when he writes, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or

nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39).

The things Paul names are all things we might expect to alienate and separate us from God. But not so! There is nothing that can ever do that.

### **Seeing Clearing and Knowing Completely**

Second, God is too wise to make a mistake. The Lord said, through the prophet Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than you ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:8-9).

The Hebrew word translated “thoughts” means to plait, to braid, to weave. So it also suggests that God is weaving a pattern, a plan in our lives, but again it is not always easy for us to see or understand. The apostle Paul spoke of this difficulty when he said, “For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

The promise of God is that one-day we shall see clearly and know completely. Until then we must accept by faith that God is too wise to make a mistake.

## The Word of a Gentleman

Finally, God is too faithful to be doubted. There is much in life we do not understand. We don't understand why bad things happen to good people. WE don't understand why kind people suffer pain. We don't understand why people we need so much in life are snatched from us by death. But, when we cannot trace the hand of God we must trust the heart of God.

David Livingston, the great missionary to Africa, returned to his native land of Scotland after sixteen years on the foreign field. His body was emaciated by the ravages of 27 fevers that had coursed through his veins. His left arm hung uselessly by his side, mangled by a lion. As he spoke to the student body at Glasgow University he asked, "Shall I tell you what sustained me during the hardships and loneliness of my exile? It was the promise of Jesus, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matt. 28:20)."

Then he added, "That is the word of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honor, so there's and end to it."

That gentleman was the Lord Jesus. Glee trusted in him and so should we — for the promise is to us as well as it was to her.

The poem, "He Maketh No Mistake" by A.H. Overton speaks to us today.

*My Father's way may twist and turn,  
My heart may throb and ache,  
But in my soul I'm glad I know,  
He maketh no mistake.*

*My cherished plans may go astray,  
My hopes may fade away,  
but still I'll trust my Lord to lead  
For He doth know the way.*

*Tho' night be dark and it may seem  
That day will never break;  
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,  
He maketh no mistake.*

*There's so much now I cannot see,  
My eyesight's far too dim;  
but come what may. I'll simply trust*

*And leave it all to Him.*

*For by and by the mist will lift  
And plain it all He'll make,  
Through all the way, tho' dark to me,  
He made not one mistake.*

So when the days are long, when the nights are dark, and when life's load is heavy, I hope you'll remember: God is too kind to be cruel; he is too wise to make a mistake; he is too faithful to be doubted. And, when you cannot trace the hand of God you can trust the heart of God.

# Chapter 11

## Set Your House in Order

*A Funeral of a Non Christian*

**2 Kings 20:1-6**

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Actor William Soroyan, who once wrote that “the best part of a man “stays forever,” lost a two-year bout with cancer. Only five days before he was hospitalized for the last time he telephoned the Associated Press to report that cancer had spread to several of his vital organs. He then gave this final statement to be used after his death:

“Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?”

Strange, isn’t it? We know that everyone dies — but we think, somehow, not me; not my wife; not my children; not my parents. We act as though we believe an exception will be made in our case.

Death is as much a part of life as birth and we should prepare for it just as carefully. Can you imagine a couple expecting a new baby and making no preparation, never discussing the situation, getting ready in no way? Yet we rush headlong toward death and few seldom ever prepare for it.

The Bible speaks to us at this very point. The Lord, through Isaiah, the prophet, said to Hezekiah, king of Israel, “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). This is a word to us also.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who popularized the study of death and dying, said there are five emotional stages a person

goes through when they know they have a terminal illness. They are:

- Shock and denial — they can't believe what they have heard and they say, "No, not me."
- Rage and anger — they become angry at God, or the doctor, or even their family and they ask, "Why me?"
- Bargaining — they try to bargain with God for more time, saying, "Yes, me, but . . ."
- Depression — as it dawns on them that they are not going to get well, that they are going to die, they withdraw or they weep easily. They say, "Oh, me."
- Acceptance — Finally, they come to terms with death and accept the inevitable. They say, "Okay, me!"

Hezekiah was in the third stage — the bargaining stage — of death. He was asking God for an extension of time and trying to bargain because of his good behavior. This is a natural response.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the great jurist, when approaching the age of ninety, said to Dean Acheson, "If the ceiling should open and through the opening should come the voice of God saying, 'Wendell, you have five minutes to live,' I should reply, 'Very well, Boss, but I wish it were ten.'"

So would I. So would you. In Hezekiah's case God granted his request and extended his life fifteen years. But even then he still had to die, so preparations needed to be made. Whether we are ever granted an extension or not, we still need to prepare for death also. It will come some day, unless the rapture comes first.

This being true, there are five ways we need to prepare

for death; five ways to set our house in order:

- We should prepare spiritually.
- We should prepare financially.
- We should prepare legally.
- We should prepare practically.
- We should prepare daily.

### **The Ultimate Security**

First, we need to prepare for death spiritually by repenting of our sins and accepting Jesus as our savior. No person is ready to die until they trust the one who lives forever. I will talk in detail about insurance. The insurance industry renders an indispensable service to every one of us. We should be grateful for their efforts to be fair and yet remain solvent and sound.

However, as John Anderson reminds us, no insurance policy on the market can offer the ultimate security that we need. Actually the term “life insurance” is a misnomer; it is not life insurance, but death insurance. Nothing we can do can “insure” the safety of our body. Even the best company can guarantee only that we will not become a liability in case of physical incapacity or that loved ones will not become destitute in case of our physical death if we insure with them.

The only one who can offer us real life insurance — eternal life insurance — is God. He gives us the abundant life now and eternal life when we die. Through faith in Christ we can live until we die and then we can live forever. Security for eternity, then, must be found in God. Look at the eternal life insurance policy:

- The premium is faith.
- The home office is heaven.
- The local agent is Jesus Christ in his living spirit.

- The terms of the policy? “He who believes in the son has eternal life; he who does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him” (John 3:36).
- And there are no preexisting conditions. Whosoever will, may come.

Ask any of the Lord’s policyholders, and you will get a testimony of complete satisfaction. All of them agree, “blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; O, what a foretaste of glory divine.”

There is one thing more! Are you covered? Can you say with the apostle Paul, “I am now ready . . .” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

### **Pick the Right Policy**

Second, we need to prepare for death financially by having an adequate insurance program. A few years ago I ministered to a family who lost several relatives at once in an automobile accident. The father of that family had allowed his insurance to expire the very day of the accident. In fact, his insurance policy expired at 12:01 midnight and he expired at 10:00 a.m., exactly nine hours and fifty-nine minutes later. His wife and children who survived him were left not only to bear the emotional loss of his life, but also the financial burden of making ends meet without adequate finances.

The Bible tells us, “. . . if any provide not for his own, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8). This, I believe, involves the responsibility to provide for our family after death as well as during life.

The word “provide” is the original means “to give aforethought to,” “to plan ahead,” “to anticipate a future event and act before it is too late.” What are we to plan for?

The financial needs of our family. Insurance is a way to do that.

### **Do God's Will Through Your Will**

Third, we need to prepare for death legally by having an up-to-date will. A will is a legal document that states how your property is to be disposed of after death. If there is no will, then your property will be disposed of as prescribed by law. But this may not be according to your wishes. And it will almost inevitably be more expensive. In spite of the importance of a will, only one out of five people have one.

There are three facts that everyone needs to remember about a will:

- The man who doesn't leave a will usually leaves trouble.
- The man who tries to do his own legal work has a fool for a client.
- Do God's will through your will.

You can use your will as a means of continuing stewardship after you have gone. In fact, some people can do more for the kingdom of God after their death than during their life.

### **Don't Be Afraid**

Fourth, we need to prepare for death practically by discussing death and planning our own funeral. We don't have to like death, but we don't need to be terrified by it either. An emotionally healthy person and family can sit down and talk about death.

The Old Testament gives frequent reference to preparations for death, both spiritually and practical by i.e.

arrangements for burial, caring for financial matters, purchasing burial plots, and seeing to family affairs. Such arrangements were made by men very much aware that they would soon die. Those who had the foresight to make such arrangements set an example for us to follow today.

There are many decisions that need to be made. This is of special concern to me. As a pastor, I've lived in six different cities over the last 40 years. Where would I be buried? Who would preach my funeral? After all, most of my life I have had no pastor. My boyhood pastor died years ago and I preached his. Which funeral home would I use? I've had a close personal relationship with funeral directors wherever I've been. Which one will care for my body? What music would I like sung?

And who would serve as my pallbearers? Sit down sometime and try to list the names of six close friends you would like to carry your body to its final resting-place. I did that the other day and it's not easy.

If I don't make those decisions, who will? If I leave them to my wife and children, they will have to make them at the very time when it will be most difficult for them to think.

### **The Wisdom We Need**

Finally, we need to prepare for death daily by living life to its fullest. In Morris West's "Shoes of the Fisherman," a nurse remarks about the death of a man in a squalid room in one of the poorest sections of Rome, "They can cope with death. It's only living that defeats them." It is often the same with us.

It was against the backdrop of the shortness of life and the certainty of death that the psalmist prayed, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto

wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). We need to breathe that same prayer.

What do we need to do to live wisely? To live life to its fullest? We need to find pleasure in the little things. I dare say if you cannot find joy in the little things of life, you will not find joy at all.

Do something for somebody else. Hug a child. Buy your wife a dozen roses. Call your parents. Write a friend. Visit a nursing home. Do something to enrich someone else’s life and that will make it a good day for you.

And live so that you leave no regrets. Mend broken relationships with your family or friends. Forgive past hurts. Live so that when you are gone or your loved ones are gone, there will be no regrets.

Pope John said shortly before his death, “My bags are packed. I am ready to leave.” So am I! I’m not anxious, but ready. Are you?

Note: This message can also be preached effectively as a regular Sunday sermon. It is best to help people prepare for death long before it comes.



# Chapter 12

## “A Balm That Heals.”

*A Christmas Memorial Message*

**TEXT: Jeremiah 8:22-9:1**

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*Each year one of our funeral homes has a memorial service at Christmas time for families who have lost loved ones during the year. As family members enter the chapel they are given a Christmas ornament and hang it on a tree in memory of their loved one. Then a memorial service is conducted. This is the message I preached at the first of these services.*

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“Christmas” said Carol Nelson, “is a time when you get homesick, even when you are home.” I have known that for years, but I did not know why. More recently I have come to understand the reason.

First, because Christmas is a time of memories — memories of family, memories of childhood, memories of days gone by. And, when we think of the past our minds are flooded with the good and the bad that we have experienced. This often times brings with it a sense of sadness, especially if there has been a death or a divorce or a great disappointment in our lives.

Second, because of unrealistic expectations, Christmas never quite lives up to what we anticipate. We hurry and scurry to get things done, and by the time we do, it is over. And we wonder, “Is this all there is?”

Moreover, Christmas reminds us of the passing of time. We realize we are getting older and we cannot reclaim the past. I have a new understanding of that this year. I lost a 35-year-old daughter-in-law this past spring. On her birthday my son took our nine-year-old grandson to visit her grave. When he returned home he said, “Dad, I wish I had a remote control and could rewind my life.” We all feel that way at times, especially when we have lost a loved one.

For those who have lost loved ones, Christmas is usually the hardest time of the year. The traditions associated with the season, decorations, programs, parties, the arrival of Christmas cards and shopping for gifts amid crowds, may actually invoke a sense of dread rather than celebration and joy. You may desire to skip November and December altogether.

We, of course, cannot rewind our lives and we cannot skip November and December. However, there are some things that can help us through this season. Jeremiah speaks of them when he writes, “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.”

This is a lament over Israel. She had gone away from God. She had passed up every opportunity to repent and to turn from their sins. Now only the judgment of God awaited her. It is in this context that Jeremiah laments over the condition of God’s people.

It should also be noted that Gilead was famous as a place of healing. In this mountainous region east of the Jordan River there grew a certain kind of tree from which they extracted an oil that was famous for its soothing and healing

qualities. So, Gilead became synonymous with healing. It was to that day what the Mayo Clinic or M.D. Anderson Hospital are to us. If there was no healing there, then there was no hope.

There is an obvious answer to Jeremiah's questions, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" "Yes! Yes there is a balm in Gilead. Yes, there is a physician there." The problem was not the lack of healing and help; the problem was the lack of application.

In days of sorrow and sadness and loss like this, we are apt also to have these same feelings of hopelessness and despair. We are apt to cry out with Jeremiah, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no one to help us in this time of sorrow?" And the answer comes back from the word of God, "Yes, yes even in a time of sorrow and heartache, there is hope and healing that God can bring."

Let me suggest six healing helps God gives to us. They are:

- The Healing Balm of Thanks
- The Healing Balm of Talk
- The Healing Balm of Tears
- The Healing Balm of Time
- The Healing Balm of Touch
- The Healing Balm of Trust

### **The Attitude of Gratitude**

First, thanksgiving is a healing balm. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died at the hand of Adolf Hitler, once wrote:

*Nothing can make up  
for the absence of someone we love ...  
It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap,  
he doesn't fill it,*

*but on the contrary, he keeps alive  
our former communion with each other,  
even at the cost of pain...*

*The dearer and richer our memories, the more  
difficult the separation.*

*But gratitude changes the pangs of memory  
into a tranquil joy.*

*The beauties of the past are borne,  
not as a thorn in the flesh,  
but as a precious gift in themselves.*

To keep an attitude of gratitude helps. As you relive the memories of your loved one, focus more on what you had than what you have lost and it will help you through the holidays.

### **Open Your Heart**

Second, talk is a healing balm. Find someone — it need not be a professional — with whom you can share your feelings. It may be your pastor or just be a friend; as long as it is someone in whom you have confidence, someone you trust, someone who will understand and who is wise.

Catherine Marshall, after the death of her husband, said she finally saw that “tightly closed hands are not in a position to receive anything — not even comfort. It matters not whether they are hands clenched in rebellion or just piteously trying to clutch the past.

“We must open our hands and our hearts to receive help that is available. We can’t receive unless we’re willing to share, willing to open our hands and hearts to others.”

### **Its OK To Cry**

Third, tears are a healing balm. Last Saturday I was

taking my grandson to Tyler from Dallas. He does not talk much about his mother's death. In an effort to draw conversation out of him, I asked, "Do you think of your mother often?" He replied, "No, not much. I do not like to. It makes me sad and I cry." I said to him, "It's okay to cry. I cry about her sometimes myself."

Moreover, it is okay. Tears are a legitimate expression of the emotion of grief. If it is okay to laugh when you are happy, then it is okay to cry when you're sad.

Some unknown poet expressed it best when he wrote:

*Ashamed of tears — this world might  
As well be ashamed of flowers,  
Or skies its stars when night appears  
As mortals be ashamed of tears.*

*We live so long life's dull, drab days  
We walk so far life's treadmill ways  
With mind so dumb and heart so mute  
We are little better than a brute.*

*Then into our lives come some grief  
That only tears can give relief  
Then the beauty floods our eyes  
That God has given rain-washed skies.*

*Ashamed of tears when even he  
Knelt weeping in Gethsemane;  
We never see God quite so clear,  
As through the prism of a tear.*

### **The Scars Are Forever**

Fourth, time is a healing balm. To lose a loved one is

much like recovering from surgery or the healing of a broken bone. Healing does come in time. However, the deeper the wound or the more serious the break, the longer it takes. Moreover, the scar will remain forever.

Yesterday we celebrated my mother's ninetieth birthday. She and Dad had been married 52 years when he died. That was 19 years ago. I asked her day before yesterday, "Mom, do you still miss dad?" She replied, "Never a week goes by, scarcely a day, that I don't think of him and miss him."

Time heals, but the scars remain.

### **Reach Out and Touch Someone**

Fifth, touching is a healing balm, i.e., reaching out to others in friendship and service. When you have lost a loved one the temptation is to slip into self-pity, to become introspective, to become antisocial. Nevertheless, fight that tendency.

Above all, avoid being alone on the actual holiday if possible. When your grief is deep and very painful, you may want to avoid others. Sitting alone during the holidays makes you even more miserable. Reach out and touch someone. It will help.

### **God Is With Us**

Finally, trust is a healing balm. Turning to God and putting your faith in him is the greatest help of all. Communicating with him will bring a source of peace and strength that you cannot find in any other way.

That is why the Christmas season is so important to us. It celebrates the coming of the great physician who heals our deepest hurts. Listen to the words of the angel to Joseph, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy

Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all of this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:20-23).

That is it — that is the message of Christmas, "God with us." Jesus has come and while death may be the king of terrors . . . Jesus is the King of kings. Nothing can sustain and strengthen you more than a sense of his presence.

The hymn writer, Phillips Brooks, in his hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," expresses it best:

*O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee  
lie!*

*Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent  
stars go by;*

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting  
Light;*

*The hopes and fears of all the years are met in  
Thee tonight.*

*O holy child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we  
pray;*

*Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us  
today!*

*We hear the Christmas angels The great glad  
tidings tell;*

*O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!*

God is with us! That is the message of Christmas. That is what helps us most in our times of grief.

# Appendix

## The Importance of the Funeral Service

There are few responsibilities of the pastor that present a greater challenge or offer a greater opportunity to minister than a funeral sermon. In times of sorrow and loss many people look to God and are more open to Him than any other time in their lives. When the funeral service is conducted correctly, the minister becomes an instrument of God for bringing God and persons together. It becomes an important means of ministry.

In my years as a pastor I conducted almost 500 funerals over a period of 35 years. Like most experienced pastors, I have confronted every situation imaginable - babies stillborn, children dying of leukemia, young people killed in accidents, murders, suicides, men in the prime of life dying of massive heart attacks, young mothers dying of cancer and of course, the elderly dying of old age.

Through the years and tears of experience I have learned that the funeral service is an opportunity to do three very needful things.

### An Opportunity to Heal

First, it is an opportunity to heal the brokenhearted. That was an important part of Jesus' ministry and it should be an important part of yours (Luke 4:18-19). As someone has said, the pastor has a twofold task - to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable. Funerals are important because they provide an opportunity to give comfort to the

living.

The apostle Paul, speaking to the church at Thessalonica about the return of Christ and the role dead believers would play in that great event, ended his teaching by saying, “Wherefore, comfort ye one another with these words.” The funeral service gives us an opportunity to do that.

### **An Opportunity to Give Hope**

Second, the funeral is a time to proclaim our hope in Jesus Christ. For most pastors the funeral service provides an opportunity to present the gospel to more lost people than any other single thing he does. Rightly conducted, it becomes an opportunity for both sowing and reaping.

### **The Opportunity to Honor**

Third, it provides an opportunity to honor the dead and to affirm the value of life. The Bible tells us that we are made in the likeness of God. That fact alone gives dignity and worth to every person, regardless of who they are or what they have done. The Lord’s first warning against murder was based on this fact (Gen. 9:6). G.K. Chesterton expressed it well, “. . . all men are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the King.”

It is right, therefore, that we recognize that dignity and worth through a funeral service.

The ritual, the friends, the flowers, the music, and the Word of God all together make the funeral service an important means of accomplishing healing, the giving of hope and the paying of honor.

# Preparation of the Funeral Service

At the outset of His earthly ministry Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from Isaiah the prophet, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).

If ministers today are to be true to their calling they must make Jesus’ priorities their priorities. And high on this list must be the work of “healing the brokenhearted.”

How do we do this? In many ways. We do it, in part, through ministering to people in times of sorrow and death. And, especially through the funeral sermon. This is no easy assignment for several reasons. First, it is because we must deal with people in the most traumatic time of their lives. And, second, death often comes with such short notice that there is little time to prepare the funeral message in advance. With all the other demands placed upon him and such a short time to prepare, the minister may be tempted just to muddle through the sermon. But, as Andrew Blackwood said, “Death comes but once, there should be no ministerial muddling. Our God is no muddler.”

The one thing I did as a pastor that helped me most at this point was to develop a dozen good funeral messages that clearly and concisely set out the Christian view of death and our hope in Christ. Some of these were prepared and preached as regular sermons and then condensed and polished for use in funerals. By using this method I

developed a variety of texts, illustrations and outlines. Once prepared I used these sermons repeatedly, choosing the appropriate text and emphasis for each occasion. Periodically I added a new sermon to the collection so that I did not grow stagnant.

Fifteen of those first sermons were published in a book entitled, “Gospel for the Graveside” in 1981. Some of the later additions are included here. By mid-ministry I had an ample supply of well-prepared sermons for almost every circumstance. Then when a funeral came in the midst of a hectic workload I was already prepared. My only regret is that I did not do this earlier in my ministry. I think this approach would help any minister - especially young pastors.

Here are several basic suggestions that I offer concerning the preparation of funeral sermons.

### **Be Biblical**

First, be biblical. The question was first posed by Job, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Through the years persons have sought to find an answer to that question in science, in nature and in human reason. Ever since Raymond Moody’s best-selling *Life After Life* came out in 1974, near-death experiences have fascinated many Americans. To many people, accounts of near-death experiences bolster the belief that dying is not an end, but a transition to another realm, a place so blissful and love-filled that people who have approached it are reluctant to return to the earthly world.

The only certain word, however, concerning life after death comes from God’s Word. The only real assurance there is of life after death rests in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because He lives, we shall live also.

The poet, John Richard Moreland, expressed this when he wrote:

*The hands of Christ  
Seem very frail.  
For they were broken  
By a nail.  
But only they  
Reach heaven at last  
Whom these frail, broken  
Hands hold fast.*

So root your funeral message in God's Word as it centers in Christ and you will offer real assurance and real comfort and real hope to people.

In each of the sermons in this book I have used the King James Version. I did this by habit and by choice. The last 40 years of multiple translations have done nothing to replace the lofty, poetic majesty of the 1611 English Bible. Someone once asked the late Raymond B. Brown, "What would you do if you knew you would die tomorrow?" He replied, "I'd read the 14th chapter of John in the King James Version."

### **Be Personal**

Second, be personal. Death is not a factory gate through which men go in crowds. They go one by one through a turnstile. Remember this when you preach the funeral sermon. It will help you to make the sermon personal

The pastor should take time to talk with the family of the deceased before the funeral and learn something about him/her. Every person is special and unique and by visiting with the family you can learn something about the birth,

work, background, character, age or family of the deceased that will allow you to add a much appreciated personal word about them. A few well-chosen personal remarks can transform a cold, formal message into a warm, personal word of comfort and hope.

A word of caution, however. Don't talk too much about the deceased. Focus mostly on Jesus Christ. He is our hope and our comforter.

### **Be Brief**

Third, be brief. The funeral service should be characterized by orderliness, simplicity and brevity. With music and message combined, the funeral service should not last more than thirty minutes. A well-prepared message can say all that needs to be said and can be absorbed by a grieving family in 10 to 15 minutes.

If we are to fulfill our calling as ministers, a part of which is to heal the brokenhearted, we must become masters at the craft of funeral sermons. Our ministry to the bereaved is too great to be taken lightly.

### **Identification, Not Transference**

It is appropriate to identify with those who grieve. In some instances, you will conduct a service where you, yourself, feel profound personal loss.

*We share our mutual woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.  
John Fawcett*

But be careful that the funeral message does not become

a place of psychological transference, a time to transfer your own feelings - especially something dredged up from your childhood - onto the family and congregation. You may need to find a trusted counselor to resolve your own grief, but for now, you have other work to do. You have come to minister, not be ministered to.

### **Keep Records**

Finally, keep records. Attach to your notes for each funeral message a record of date and person's name for each funeral.

Inevitably, you will conduct funerals for more than one person in a family. If you know what you used for one, you have choices when you conduct another. You may want to remind the family of earlier content, or you may want to avoid repetition. Don't trust your memory. Keep records.

## After the Funeral

The wife of Duke McCall, retired president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and former president of the Baptist World Alliance, died several years ago. In explaining some of his feelings, Dr. McCall wrote, “After a church service, a well-intentioned acquaintance caught me off guard by saying, ‘I am sorry you lost your wife.’ Before I could edit my response I said, ‘I did not lose my wife. I know where Margueritte is. I am the one who is lost.’”

Anyone who has had a loved one die knows how devastating it can be. It leaves you disoriented, distraught and lost. It takes us a long time to find ourselves.

The pastor who is really interested in “healing the brokenhearted” soon realizes that his work is not finished when he has preached the funeral sermon or conducted the graveside service. Grief goes on and so must our ministry to the grieving.

What can the minister say and do at such a time that will be helpful to the family? There is no one dramatic gesture or pearl of wisdom that will dissolve the heartache, but there are many acts of ministry that can convey your concern and help to soften the blow that the person has suffered.

I offer several practical suggestions learned from personal experience as a pastor who also wrestled with the awkwardness of what to do after the funeral is over.

### Reach Out to Them

First, be there. For a long time I dreaded going to see people when they had lost a loved one because I thought I had to say something comforting and I didn’t know what to

say. In time I realized, however, that words may not be the primary need of grieving people. Your presence is what counts. This is the first thing the bereaved needs above all else. Long after they have forgotten what you say they remember that you came.

Even a government agency like NASA recognizes the importance of being there. Following the fire and explosion that destroyed the Challenger space shuttle, the families of each of the seven astronauts who died had another astronaut family at their side soon after the disaster. The support families were there to help the Challenger families with everything from travel and food arrangements to boarding the family pet. "With all the vast technology of our space age," said Clark Covington, manager of the Space-Station Project at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, "there is still nothing more powerful than one human being reaching out to another."

### **Bound By a Thousand Cords**

Second, help them understand their grief. Grief is a person's reaction to a loss. The more meaningful the loss, the more intense the grief. Many people, when they experience grief, wonder what's happening to them. When there comes a numbness of spirit, the loss of memory, the trembling of limbs, they wonder, "Am I dying, too?" When the tears come uncontrollably - or not at all - when they can't sleep, when they have feelings of anxiety, fear, anger and guilt, they wonder, "Am I going crazy?" or "Is there something wrong with me?"

Actually, each of these can be a normal part of the grieving process, and it is important to help people understand that.

As in Gulliver's Travels, where Gulliver lay tied to the

earth by the stakes and ropes of the Lilliputians, so the grief sufferer, too, is bound by a thousand emotional cords to the person who has died. These ties are not loosed easily or quickly.

A widower may come home from work at night and open the door to the aroma of his wife's cooking - though nothing is on the stove. If you ask a widow, she will tell you her husband is dead. But she may also tell you she hears him in the kitchen at night, getting a snack as he often did in life. She is struggling with separation. Her husband is gone, but her memory is vividly present, and she misses him terribly. A widow may continue to set two plates at the dinner table for months. She reaches out to touch him in the bed.

Spouses may even find themselves talking to their dead mate long after they are gone. The husband of a friend of mine died. In their 35 years of marriage she had never taken out the garbage. He always did that. She was putting out the garbage one day, and before she thought she looked up and said, "See what you've done Charlie. You left me and now I have to do something I never did before. I have to carry out the garbage."

Several years ago a teenager in our church was killed in an automobile accident. After the funeral his mother asked me, "Do you think it will be okay if I talk to Kirk?" I said, "Yes, I think so." Then I told her what the late Peter Marshall once said, "Those we love are with the Lord. The Lord has promised to be with us. Now, if they are with Him and He is with us, they can't be far away."

### **Learn to Listen**

Third, be a good listener. For most people, talking is an effective means of releasing emotions and undergoing

healing. So listen! That will help as much as anything you do.

In their grief people may ask, “Why, God?” “Why did this happen to me?” Don’t be a glib Bible quoter. Simplistic answers to complex questions are not only unhelpful, they can be harmful. Statements like, “This is God’s will,” or “God knows best,” are theologically shallow and provide little or no comfort. It is better to hear their questions as cries of pain rather than literal questions.

And don’t attempt to tell the bereaved how he/she feels. To say, for example, “You must feel relieved now that he is out of pain;” is presumptuous. Even to say, “I know how you feel” is questionable unless someone has told you his feelings. I know how I feel about my father’s death. I really don’t know how you feel about your father’s death. Learn from the mourner. Don’t instruct.

### **Emotional First Aid**

Fourth, let them express their grief. Grief resembles steam in a steam engine; unless it can escape in a controlled way, pressure builds up and the boiler explodes. Griefwork must be done. Griefwork will be done. Eventually, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely, in a creative or distorted manner, the work will be done. So, emotional release should be encouraged. Comments like, “Be strong,” or “You’ve got to hold up for others,” tells the person it’s not okay to cry, to hurt, or to be angry; it’s only okay to “be strong.” Holding the person’s hand or putting your arm around their shoulder indicates that it’s okay to grieve.

One way to express grief is through tears. There is a Jewish proverb that says, “What soap is to the body, tears are to the soul.” Tears can help cleanse the soul.

Some people think that faith and tears don’t mix. They

think a sturdy faith in God and the promise of life eternal are out of keeping with sobbing and a display of grief. But grief does not deny faith.

When Mary and her companions took Jesus to the town cemetery where Lazarus was buried Christ stood before the tomb, and the text states simply and profoundly, “Jesus wept.” Those simple words speak volumes about the inner feelings of Jesus and His reaction to grief at the death of His friend.

Seeing His tears, friends of the family remarked, “See how much He loved him!” In that incident, Jesus refuted by His tears the notion that “big boys don’t cry.” He who remains history’s perfect and complete man stood by the graveside and wept.

Psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers, following the death of her husband, wrote about her own tears, “The standard reaction to a widow’s tears is to say, ‘There, there, you mustn’t cry. Tears won’t help.’ But tears do help. They are a kind of emotional first aid. A widow will stop when she no longer needs to cry.”

### **What Can Wait, Should**

Fifth, encourage the postponement of major decisions during a period of grief. When a person is in deep sorrow they may decide to sell their home, quit their job or make other decisions they will later regret. Grieving people need to realize that no matter how they feel at the moment, their feelings will change. Things will look different in time. So, whatever can wait should wait until after the period of intense grief.

### **Comfort the Children**

Sixth, don’t ignore the children of the family. Children,

because of their limited experience, may not understand all that has happened when a loved one dies, but don't assume that a seemingly calm child is not sorrowing. Children do grieve and they grieve deeply. At such times the greatest gift you can give a child is an understanding heart. A child's feelings are worthy of respect. Jesus took time for little children and so should we.

### **Use the Lay People**

Seventh, encourage others to visit and help. Among life's greatest blessings in time of grief are friends and fellow church members. They are often instruments of God's grace. Since a pastor has many people to minister to, he should enlist, train and encourage his people to join him in ministering to the grieving.

Deacons, Sunday school classes and select individuals can be effective in this way. Some of them will have the gift of consolation. And they will have the time to reach out to the brokenhearted. They can drop by for a cup of coffee. They can take them to lunch. They can listen. And in time they can help draw the grieving back into outside activities.

They need not be trained counselors. As psychologist Bernie Zilbergeld said, "If you simply want to talk to someone, it probably doesn't make a lot of difference whom you select, as long as you feel comfortable and he or she is listening."

### **Grief is Major Surgery**

Eighth, stay in touch. Grieving takes a long time. Exactly how long depends on the circumstances or the loss, the depth of the relationship, and the emotional makeup of

the griever. It is not unusual for it to last a year or more.

Grief may be compared to recovering from surgery or the healing of a broken bone. God has built into the human body a remarkable capacity to heal itself. Many physicians will tell you that all they do is cooperate with and use the natural healing processes. But even with the body's capacity to heal itself, as suggested previously, it takes time for it to adjust to and overcome the effects of serious surgery or for a broken bone to heal. The loss that causes grief is major surgery. The healing takes time.

One way to stay in touch is by mail. When I was a pastor I made a practice each Christmas and New Year season of writing a note to each member of my congregation who had lost a loved one during the year. Holidays are the worst times of the year for grieving people and Christmas is the hardest of all the holidays.

In the notes I spoke of my love for the deceased and my concern for and availability to them especially at that time. It was a simple gesture but it was one of the most appreciated things I did.

### **It Helps Them to Help**

Ninth, in time gently draw the mourner into quiet outside activities.

Especially, if you lead them to do something for somebody else, something that helps them feel useful, you will be helping them. Activity is a crucial ingredient to the healing process.

Jesus is our model for ministry as well as our master. When His friend Lazarus died, He went and He wept and He witnessed - after the funeral was over. That's what we must do also if we are to help heal the brokenhearted.

## Teach Your People to Minister

When death strikes people want to help but often do not know what to do. While grief is not a trip you can pack for and it is utterly lonely there are things people can do to help. The wise pastor will not only minister to the grieving himself, he will also teach his people what they can do.

Here is what they can do to help.

- Get in touch. Telephone. Ask when you can visit and how you might help. Take the initiative. Don't be afraid of intruding. Your friend may be suffering too much to know what he or she needs.
- Attend to practical matters. Offer to help answer the telephone, usher in callers, prepare meals, clean the house, care for the children, mow the lawn, sort through the mail. This kind of help lifts burdens and creates a bond.
- Say little on the first visit. Before the burial, a brief embrace, a press of the hand, a few words of affection may be all that is needed.
- Be yourself. Show concern and sorrow in your own way.
- Avoid clichés such as “He is out of pain,” “Time heals all wounds,” “At least he didn't suffer” or even “I know how you feel.” You don't and you can't know. A simple “I'm sorry” is better.
- Keep in touch. Be available. Grief can't be fixed

in a hurry. It's not like a root canal - 50 minutes of pain and a night of medication and then it's over. Recognize that recovery takes time - often a long, long time.

- Encourage others to visit and help.
- Accept silence. If the mourner doesn't feel like talking, don't force conversation. Silence is better than aimless chatter.
- Be a good listener. This is the one thing the bereaved needs above all else. Is she emotional? Accept that. Does she cry? Accept that too. Is she angry with God? Accept whatever feelings are expressed. Your presence - your willingness to listen or the two most precious gifts you can offer.
- Do not attempt to tell the bereaved how he or she feels. To say, for example, "You must feel relieved now that he is out of pain," is presumptuous. Even to say, "I know just how you feel," is questionable. Learn from the mourner; do not instruct.
- Do not probe for details about the death. If the survivor offers information, listen with understanding.
- Comfort children in the family. Do not assume that a seemingly calm child is not sorrowing. Be a friend to whom feelings can be confided and with whom tears can be shed. In most cases,

children should be left in the home and not shielded from the grieving of others.

- Avoid talking to others about trivia in the presence of the recently bereaved.
- Go to the funeral or memorial service to swell the ranks, to be one member of a community mourning an irreplaceable person.
- Allow the “working through” of grief. Do not whisk away clothing or hide pictures. Do not criticize seemingly morbid behavior.
- Write a letter of condolence - store bought cards don’t take the place of a personal letter, no matter how short or awkwardly worded. The most meaningful letters describe happy memories you had with the deceased.
- Encourage the postponement of major decisions. Whatever can wait should wait until after the period of intense grief.
- In time, gently draw the mourner into quiet outside activity.
- When the mourner returns to social activity, treat him or her as a normal person. Avoid pity. It destroys self-respect. Simply understanding is enough
- Be aware of needed progress through grief. If the

mourner seems unable to resolve anger or guilt, suggest a consultation with a clergyman or another trained counselor.

- In time-share your faith - a prayer, a verse, a good book may be enough. God is the “God of all comfort” and if we can witness to him in a kind and gentle way, we help eternally.

You may have to give more time and more of yourself than you imagined, but you will know the satisfaction of being truly helpful.

## Helping a Child Deal with Death

Death, to a child, especially if it's the death of a parent, can be as mysterious as it is traumatic. Until around ages 9 or 10, children do not fully comprehend death. They may or may not cry. Nonetheless, the loss and grief is real.

When we told my 8-year-old grandson his mother might die, his primary concern seemed to be himself—what's going to happen to me? Who will take care of me? (See Chapter 1). The awareness that his mother was not coming home again was slow and painful.

While each child, just like each adult is different, there are some things we can do to help a child prepare for death.

- Explain death to your child in terms they can understand. Perhaps you could compare it to a cicada shell: You leave behind your body, which actually serves as a shell for your spirit. Once you die, your spirit leaves your body and goes to heaven to be with God. Your body is left behind and is buried by your loved ones in remembrance of you.
- Visit a funeral with your child, noting that the dead person is happy in heaven but acknowledging that friends are sad because they will miss hugging and talking to the person.
- Let your child express his or her fears and acknowledge them realistically. Evening prayer can be a time when parents “listen” to what is on the child's mind.

- Purchase a pet for your child to love far in advance of the expected death, on an occasion that is not associated with a birthday or any other holiday.
- Create a loving daily ritual to be shared by the healthy parent, or other caregiver, with your child, and continue it after the other parent's death.
- Prepare audiotapes or videotapes of your child.
- While you should never blame God for what has happened, you should bear witness to the child of Christ's death, burial and resurrection.

## Additional Help

### What Makes A Man A Success

#### THAT MAN IS A SUCCESS

*“Who has lived well, and  
laughed often, and loved much,  
Who has gained the respect of  
intelligent men and the  
love of children,  
Who has filled his niche  
and accomplished his task;  
Who leaves the world better than  
he found it, whether by an  
improved poppy, a perfect  
poem or a rescued soul;  
Who never lacked appreciation  
of earth’s beauty or failed to  
express it;  
Who looked for the best in others  
and gave the best he had.”*  
*by Bessie Stanley*

### No Hope

In Newport, Rhode Island there is a Jewish cemetery that has over the gatepost at the entrance two torches turned upside down. They symbolize that the light of life had gone out. While we who follow Christ have an endless hope, most people see death as a hopeless end.

### Memorial Day - Tribute to Military Men

“No matter what you may have read, no matter what they tell you when at last all who survived have returned

home, you who stayed at home will never be able to understand how terrible some of it really was . . . Let us not so much mourn the dead as thank our God that such men have lived.” - Gen. George Patton, Jr.

### **God’s Provision**

**CORRIE TEN BOOM:** If God sends us on stony paths, he provides strong shoes.

### **The Resurrection**

It used to worry me that Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb . . . But S.M. Lockrige helped. He said, “Why would he want to buy one - he was only going to use it for three days.”

### **Ready to Die**

John Jasper, the great Black Preacher was born a slave and lived in slavery about forty years and lived forty years after slavery. He said in the last words before he died, “I have finished my work. I’m waiting at the river, looking across for further orders.”

### **Hope & Despair**

Contrast Paul’s optimism with Hamlet’s view of life and death. In that great soliloquy Hamlet says, “To be or not to be, that is the question.” What a dilemma: to live in my misery or to commit suicide and discover that death is more ugly than life. Either way Hamlet is a loser.

Paul says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” If he lives, he can handle all circumstances because he has the resources of the resurrected Jesus Christ. If he dies he will go to be with the Lord. He’s a winner if he

lived, and more of a winner if he died. (Phil. 1:21)

The test of a good life is whether it will stand the test of death. Paul could pass the test.

### **The Body & the Soul**

A Jesuit priest said, “Your body is just a place your memory calls home.”

### **Heavenly Rewards**

Missionary Henry C. Morrison, who returned from Africa on the same boat as Theodore Roosevelt’s African expedition, had been on the African mission fields for 40 years. When the ship entered New York harbor, Roosevelt was received with great fanfare including a boat armada. For a moment Morrison thought he, not Roosevelt, deserved the reception, but then a small voice came to him whispering, “Henry - you’re not home yet.”

### **Death Not the End**

Henry Ward Beecher said, “When the sun goes below the horizon he is not set: the heavens glow for a full hour after his departure. And when a great and good man sets, the sky of the world is luminous long after he is out of sight. Such a man cannot die out of this world. When he goes he leaves behind him much of himself.”

### **The Death of a Child:**

In a sermon on the death of his son Alex, William Sloane Coffin made the following statement: “When parents die, as did my mother last month, they take with them a large portion of the past. But when children die, they take away the future as well.”

## **Death & Heaven**

When John Quincy Adams was eighty years old, a friend inquired, “How is John Quincy Adams today?” “Quite well, I thank you,” replied Adams, “but the house in which he lives is becoming dilapidated, in fact almost uninhabitable. I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out before long. But he himself is well, quite well.”

## **Our New Body**

The great preacher D.L. Moody said that one-day you would read in the newspaper that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Then he said, “Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher - that is all - out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal, a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.”

## **Tears & Heaven**

Henry Ward Beecher: “God washes the eyes by tears until they can behold the invisible land where tears shall come no more.”

## **The Lessons of Death**

The book “Tuesdays With Morrie” has been on the best seller list in America for over a year. Here are some essential quotes from the book.

“I traded lots of dreams for a bigger paycheck , and I never even realized I was doing it.”

“The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love and let it come in.”

“Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live.”

### **Death of a Son**

My Boy

“So let him live,  
Love work, love play  
Love all that life can give;  
And when he grows too  
Weary to feel joy,  
Leave life, with laughter,  
To some other boy .”  
- Sir Charles C. Wakefield

### **A Christian View of Death**

As Dr. W.O. Carver, longtime professor at Southern Seminary, lay dying, he quoted this statement of Paul’s (II Tim.4:6-8) and then he added, “I’ve been cut loose, my sails are up, and I’m just waiting for the wind to bear me home.”

### **Everyone Dies**

“Somebody has said the whole world is one giant hospital and every patient in it is terminal.”

### **Fight The Good Fight**

In the end it will not matter to us whether we fought with flails or reeds. It will matter to us greatly on what side we fought. G.K. Chesterton

### **Fear of Death**

Never fear shadows.( Psalm 23) They simply mean there’s a light shining somewhere nearby. - Ruth E. Renkel

### **We All Die**

“Each person is born,” so stated Mark Twain, “to one

possession which out values all the others - his last breath.”

### **Heedless Knowledge:**

*Man always knows his life  
will shortly cease,  
Yet madly lives as if he  
knew it not.  
- Richard Baxter in Hypocrisy*

### **Heaven:**

In 1516 Sir Thomas Moore wrote his now famous novel entitled *Utopia*. It was about an ideal state where all is ordered for the best of humankind as a whole.

In *Utopia* all evils - such as poverty, sickness, misery - simply do not exist. Moore’s point is stated in his title, for *Utopia* is a Greek word which means “no place.”

In other words, there’s no place this side of heaven where we are free from the effects of sin and death.

### **Problems**

All of us have problems. The difference between bad problems and terrible problems is that bad problems are someone else’s; terrible problems are our.

### **We All Have Troubles**

*The day is dark and cold and dreary.  
It rains and the wind is never weary.  
The vine still clings to the moldering wall  
But at every gust the dead leaves fall  
And the day is dark and dreary.*

*My life is cold and dark and dreary.  
It rains and the wind is never weary.*

*My thoughts still cling to the moldering past  
But hopes of youth fall thick in the blast  
And the days are dark and dreary.*

*Be still sad heart and cease repining.  
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining.  
Thy fate is the common fate of all:  
Into each life some rain must fall.  
Some days must be dark and dreary  
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

### **The Dash**

*I read of man who stood to speak  
At the funeral of a friend.  
He referred to the dates on her tombstone  
From the beginning ... to the end.  
He noted that first came the date of birth  
And spoke the following date with tears,  
But he said what mattered most of all  
Was the dash between those years. (1900-1970)*

*For the dash represents all the time  
That she spent alive on earth...  
And now only those who loved her  
Know what that little line is worth.  
For it matters not how much we own;  
The cars...the house... the cash,  
What matters is how we live and love  
And how we spend our dash.*

*So think about this long and hard...  
Are there things you'd like to change?  
For you never know how much time is left,*

*That can still be rearranged.  
IF we could just slow down enough  
To consider what's true and real,  
And always try to understand  
The way the other people feel.*

*And be less quick to anger,  
And show appreciation more  
And love the people in our lives  
Like we've never loved before.  
If we treat each other with respect,  
And more often wear a smile...  
Remembering that this special day  
Might only last a little while.*

*So when your eulogy's being read  
With your life's actions to rehash...  
Would you be proud of the things they say  
About how you spent your dash?*

*- Linda M. Ellis*

*Previously we published a poem entitled "The Dash", listing the author as unknown. However, we have recently learned that "The Dash" was actually written by Linda M. Ellis of Linda's Lyrics, [www.lindaslyrics.com](http://www.lindaslyrics.com), and that Ms. ellis owns and has registered the copyright to her poem.*

### **Free At Last**

*Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free.  
I'm following the path God laid for me.  
I took His hand when I heard His call,  
I turned my back and left it all.  
I could not stay another day  
To laugh, to love, to work, or play.  
Tasks left undone must stay that way,  
I found the peace at the close of the day.*

*If my parting has left a void.  
 Then fill it with remembered joy.  
 A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss.  
 Ah, yes, these things I too will miss,  
 Be not burdened with times of sorrow,  
 I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow.  
 My life's been full, I've savored much,  
 Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.  
 Perhaps my time seemed all to brief,  
 Don't lengthen it now with undue grief.  
 Life up your heart and share with me,  
 God wanted me now, He set me free.*

## Tears

A psychology professor at California State University tells the following story: “When I was 12 years old my father mocked me for crying one time. I consciously made a decision right immediately that I would never cry again. And I kept it, too, for years. When I finally realized crying is good and that men need to cry to, I couldn’t do it anymore. Since then, I’ve been trying to learn to cry again, and it’s been very difficult. The same thing goes for feelings. It’s very hard for me to let myself experience them most of the time.” (*The Other Side*: “I Never Saw Clark Kent Cry”).

## Loss of a Friend

When Mozart’s friend and physician Barizane died, he wrote in his diary, “Today I was so unfortunate to lose by death a noble man. He is at rest. But I shall never be at rest again until I have the felicity of seeing him again in a better world and never more depart.”

## The Joy of Heaven

Helen Keller who overcame blindness and deafness to make an unforgettable contribution to the world said, “For three things I thank God everyday of my life - that he has vouchsafed me knowledge of his works. Deep thanks that he has set in my darkness the lamp of faith; deep, deepest thanks that I have another life to look forward to. A life joyous with light and flowers and heavenly songs.”

## We Work for Eternity

Someone asked Michaelangelo why he was so careful with his painting. He replied, “I paint for eternity.”

## Death Claims Us All

The Sunday night movie on Lincoln’s Gettysburg address entitled, “The Perfect Tribute” (May 4, 1991), a confederate soldier met a young boy who was seeking his brother, Carter, who was in a military hospital in Washington and had been wounded at Gettysburg. He said to the young boy, as he lifted up a handful of dirt, “The land is the source of life. First it feeds you. Then it claims you.”

## Fear of Death

Time seemed endless for a young vaudeville dancer named James Cagney when he composed this couplet:

*Each man starts with his very first breath  
To devise shrewd means for outwitting death.*

## Facing Death

Sigmund Freud once wrote, “At bottom, no one believes in his own death . . . Every one of us is convinced of his own immortality.” To accept mortality is to become

conscious of life's boundary. This awareness comes with fear and trembling, as we admit we are creatures of dust, earthen vessels.

### **We All Die**

Leo Buscaglia made the statement, the best selling author and popular lecturer on love and life. He was talking about the importance of doing what is important now. Today. Then came the startling phrase. "After all," Buscaglia said, "no one will get out of this world alive."

### **Jesus Shows Us How**

Bishop Stephen Neill was fond of observing, "We all have some dying to do. Jesus showed us how it should be done."

### **Life's Fatal:**

The TV movie, "A Triumph of the Heart: the Ricky Bell Story" is the story of a USC running back who was the number one draft pick and runner-up to the Heisman trophy the year he graduated. He was drafted number one by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers football team. His family had taught him to help other people and so he became involved in helping a little boy named Ryan who had suffered seizures that left him with a speech impediment and unable to walk or use his arms normally. When Ricky Bell first met Ryan's grandmother and he learned of the boy's condition, he asked, "Is it fatal?" The grandmother replied "Life is fatal."

### **The Despair of Unbelief:**

Ernie Pyle, the renowned war correspondent of the South Pacific in World War II and Pulitzer Prizewinner came to

an untimely end, a deluded man. He once wrote, “There is no sense to the struggle, but there is no choice but to struggle. It seemed to me that living is futile and death the final indignity. I wish you would shine any of your light in my direction. God knows that I have run out of light.”

### **Death Comes to All**

Death: John Donne said there is a democracy about death. “It comes equally to us all, and makes us all equal when it comes.”

### **Live Well**

In his humorous style Mark Twain had always urged, “Let us endeavor to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.”

### **Looking at the End**

An old proverb says, “When the oak is felled, the whole forest echoes with its fall, but a hundred acorns are sown in silence by an unnoticed breeze.” I like that proverb. It is profound. We pay more attention to the end of things than we ever do to their beginnings.

















