

Funeral: Prepare Your Memorial Service

So teach us to number our days, That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:12

LORD, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days, Let me know how transient I am. Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Thy sight, Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Psalm 39:4-5

...the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. 2Timothy 4:6b,7

Closets are important in a home because they store private memories or possessions for the family which we do not necessarily want others to see. One of these personal items that we usually have tucked away deep in our closets is a file with all of our important documents such as birth certificates, wills, passports, insurance policies, medical records and car titles. Not only must a godly man keep documents for his life, but he must also keep documents for his death. Every man of God should keep ready in the closet of his life a detailed funeral plan as well as a love letter to each of his family members.

You see, because our Father is sovereign over all the details of life, death is not an accident....it's an appointment! Just as God planned your life without your input, He has planned your death without your counsel. And we must be prepared for our deaths because a man will never live his life to the fullest until he has faced his death.

This is an important element in becoming a disciple of Christ. We need to be men who think and live in terms of eternity and not just for the weekend, a vacation, or retirement like the world does. Don't be the kind of man who decorates his room at Motel 6!

The ultimate statistic in life is that one out of one dies! Nothing gets a man's attention like death! There is something about coming face to face with one's own mortality that puts life on this side of the grave into proper perspective. All of a sudden the unimportant things that clamor for our attention evaporate and the vital priorities of life rise to the surface to burst upon our heart and soul. A man is really never ready to live until he is prepared to die. God calls us to walk with Him on both sides of the grave. God calls us to have a

right perspective on life. God calls us to die to ourselves and to live for Him.

The Apostle Paul believed that if Christ was worth living for, He was also worth dying for. That is why he exclaims, "*Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" (Phil 1:20-21) So, are you ready to both live for and die for your Lord Jesus Christ Who both lived and died for you?

Without being morbid, we would like you to plan for your funeral. This exercise will help you to accomplish three things:

1. Help you gain a more balanced and Christlike perspective on life by getting a better grasp of your own death. As Steven Covey says, "Begin with the end in mind."
2. Help you to take a giant step in learning to "die to yourself" in order to live for Christ and others.
3. Give you a practical way to love your family should the Lord take you to be with Him before you have the chance to tell them one last time of your love.



A man and his ever-nagging wife went on vacation to Jerusalem. While they were there, the wife passed away. The undertaker told the husband, "You can have her shipped home for \$5,000, or you can bury her here, in the Holy Land, for \$150." The man thought about it and told him he would just have her shipped home. The undertaker asked, "Why would you spend \$5,000 to ship your wife home, when it would be wonderful to be buried here and you would spend only \$150?"

The man replied, "Long ago a man died here, was buried here, and three days later he rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance."

Read the following example and then plan your own!

Sample Cover Letter To Your Spouse or Relative

Dear Mary, I am writing this letter as one of the last tangible ways that I can love you before we spend eternity together with our Lord. Honey, I don't want you to have to make the many decisions about my funeral that will undoubtedly come your way. Instead, I want you to focus on the Lord, the children, and your own needs at this time. Instead of being concerned with details and arrangements I want you to concentrate on putting into perspective the many beautiful and special memories that we shared during the wonderful life that the Lord gave us together for all these years. Sweetie, I encourage you to follow the suggested guidelines below. Let the Lord minister to you during this time. And don't worry about ministering to others! Make the time meaningful for you and the kids. Please feel free to change whatever so that it is meaningful to you. And don't forget to give the kids their personal letters from me. You can find them in the computer directory under the SMITH/DEATH LETTER. All the needed financial documents and other information you will need to put things in order can be found in our fireproof safe as well as in the computer file named, 'My Death.' I love you, Jim (Phil 1:21)

Your Funeral And/Or Memorial Service

Person In Charge: My brother, Bill, has agreed to walk you through *everything* and to make all arrangements. All the Board guys will also help in this since they are local.

Theme: *"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain!"* Phil 1:21

Passages that shaped my life:

Life Verses: Exodus 33:11 & 18 through 34:8

Work Verse for which I served: Colossians 1:28-29

Character development to become more like Christ:

Phil 3:7-14. My plaque with words for the year on it.

Headstone: "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" Col 1:27

Funeral Home: Pleasant Valley Gardens. 732-1111.

Cremation: I would prefer to have my body cremated as discussed over the years. I desire my family and friends to remember me alive while serving Christ. The cost should be around \$5,000. If it would bring a meaningful closure to our life together as a family for you

and the kids to have a private viewing before cremation then feel free to do so, especially if it could help to begin the grieving and healing process. The cost for the rental coffin is nominal. Remember that the 'real Jim' is with the Lord.

Parts Of The Service:

1. Read Scripture or pray. Bill, Rob, John, Jeb, Joe, Dave.
2. Testimonies: I have asked Doug to lead a time for family and friends to share a brief testimony. They will be video taped for you as a way of encouragement and keeping memories. Honey, include the testimonies *only* if it would be an encouragement and *only* if it would not take the focus away from the Lord. If you want, just about any of the men above would share a few words as a sort of a eulogy. The point is that if people feel they need to say something, let them speak about the Lord's grace and not about me.
3. Service: David and Bob will put the service together and preside. Please ask one of them to present the Gospel clearly w/ compassion and boldness. Of course, you and the kids are welcome to say anything or nothing, as is meaningful to you.
4. Music: Any combination of the following. If Sue is up to it, I would love to have her play one song on the piano. But perhaps it would be better if she just focused on the Lord. Your call. Same with Linda if she wants to sing "How Beautiful" from Isaiah 52:7.
 - Crown Him With Many Crowns
 - Peace Like a River
 - Shout To The Lord
 - My Jesus I Love Thee (all verses)
5. Key thoughts to be communicated:
 - The Faithfulness of the Lord
 - The need for each person to "do business" with God and to come to Him through Christ or to rededicate their lives to grow in and serve Him.
 - A sure hope in our God that He can be trusted and that it is definitely "worth it" to put our full trust in Him by fully submitting our lives to Him.

Now, It's Your Turn!

1. Take your time! Many men have found this to be one of the most helpful ways to gain God's perspective on their lives. So please don't blow through it just to get it done. This is a project designed to help you get God's real perspective in life and to help you rearrange your priorities so that God can continue to mold you into a man of God.
2. Prepare, focus and soften your heart by meditating on a few passages of Scripture. As always, circle the words or phrases which most grab your heart. Mark 8:34-38; Luke 12:15-40; I Corinthians 15:1-11, 17, 31, 50-58; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 14:1-9; Ecclesiastes 3:11, 5:15-16, 6:1-6, 12, 7:1-2, 9:10-11; 12:13-14.
3. Make this meaningful for you. Feel free to depart from the format presented. Make it meaningful for your family members by letting them know what you are doing and why. This will be very unusual for them in that we live in a culture that, for the most part, denies the reality of death and seldom discusses it in order to now make others feel bad.
4. We encourage you to put your funeral information on a computer so that you can easily update it every 6 months.
5. Using the examples above, plan out the details of your funeral. Remember, this is a tangible way to love your family. Discuss many of your ideas with your wife or family such as open casket, cremation, pastor, funeral home.
6. Invest the time to educate your family regarding death from God's perspective. For example you may want to read and explain passages such as John 11 (the raising of Lazarus); John 14:1-14 (Christ's promise of preparing a place in heaven for His followers), 1 Corinthians 15 (the absolute fact and importance of Christ's resurrection) or I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 (what happens at death).
7. Consider additional ways to practically prepare for your death and love your family. We highly recommend writing "legacy letters" to each of your family members. You can get guidance on this from the life assignment entitled, *Funeral - Legacy Letters* at www.focusedliving.com.

Other practical ideas include:

- organize your financial records in one place for easy access making sure to include all account numbers, contact people and their phone numbers.
- Perhaps you will want to buy a cemetery plot.
- Prepare a will or update the one you already have.



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