

THE BAKER FUNERAL HANDBOOK

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17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To: John, Matthew, Katie, Andrew, Carson

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds
of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.”

Psalm 78:4

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Preface

I now feel so weaned from earth, my affections so much in Heaven, that I can leave you all without regret, yet I do not love you less, but God more.

William Wilberforce

Labor now to live so, that at the hour of death thou mayest rather rejoice than fear. . . . Happy is he that always hath the hour of his death before his eyes, and daily prepareth himself to die. . . . Be thou therefore always in a readiness, and so lead thy life that death may never take thee unprepared.

Thomas à Kempis

In the face of death, grieving church members and their families need the comforting presence of a pastor as much as, if not more than, at any other time. Pastors are often called upon to minister to the dying in homes and in hospitals. Immediately following a death, pastors are

expected to meet with the surviving family to comfort as well as to counsel concerning the funeral or memorial service and burial arrangements. Pastors then preside over these services as representatives of Christ's church.

Why Have Funerals and Memorial Services?

Funerals and memorial services provide an opportunity for family and friends to honor and remember the departed one. Such services provide a means for the Christian community to show support and sympathy for those who grieve. This is an occasion to affirm one's faith in the resurrected Christ and the eternal home he is preparing for those who know him as Savior and Lord. At the graveside committal service the body or ashes of the deceased are respectfully laid to rest in anticipation of the future resurrection.

Where Can Pastors Turn for Direction in Planning Funerals and Memorial Services?

Full funeral liturgies cannot be found in the pages of Scripture. We are therefore given freedom to employ scriptural truths to develop appropriate Christian funerals (with a casket or cremated remains present) and memorial services (without a casket and sometimes following cremation). Whereas in past years pastors commonly turned to their own traditional denominational services for the full spectrum of funeral needs, we have witnessed a gradual shift away from this standardized approach. Many pastors, taking into account the circumstances of the

death as well as the unique background of the deceased, are recognizing the need to be aware of the funeral customs of a wider diversity of denominations. Denominational distinctions are breaking down as funeral and memorial services today often vary greatly. Personalized services with more congregational participation have become more frequent.

The Baker Funeral Handbook provides pastors from multiple denominations with comprehensive resources to tailor creative funerals, memorial services, and committal services. A quick scan through the table of contents will reveal the wide range of resources, especially helpful when one is called upon to preside over a service with a minimum of preparation time.

How Can This Handbook Be Used?

Here are some examples of ways this book might prove helpful:

- Experienced pastors can profit from the stimulation of being exposed to funeral and memorial service customs from a variety of denominations. Rather than purchasing eleven different denominational handbooks, pastors can use this single volume to construct a creative and personalized service.
- Pastors who face special needs such as conducting a funeral for one who committed suicide, a request for a memorial service for a stillborn infant, the funeral for a child, the death of someone in an accident, or a funeral for someone who does not profess

to be a Christian, can find in these pages helpful, specific, and appropriate suggestions.

- Ministers who need to put together a funeral message within a short space of time will find resources in the form of suggested texts, illustrations, quotations, last words of noted individuals, and guidelines for such messages.
- When visiting with the dying, pastors will find in these pages appropriate Scripture texts and ideas for prayer, such as suggestions on how to pray with someone dying of AIDS or someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease.
- The charts in the appendixes may be photocopied for use in planning funeral and memorial services, for working with parishioners to preplan funeral preferences, or for keeping a record of services performed.
- Pastors may wish to recommend this book to parishioners who request help in preplanning funeral or memorial services for themselves or family members.
- Ministerial students or new pastors who face their first funerals, memorial services, or committal services and need direction will find it here.
- Seminary or Bible college instructors may find this a useful manual to recommend to their students or to use in pastoral duties classes.

Conducting funerals and memorial services is one of the highest privileges for ministers of the gospel of the resurrected Christ. This handbook is offered with the prayer that you will find in its pages

Preface

valuable tools that will enable you to minister effectively to the dying and their families. May the carrying out of our solemn, sacred duties only serve to heighten our anticipation of the new heaven and new earth where it is promised, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Having served faithfully in ministering to the dying and their families, may we echo the words of Matthew Henry (1662–1714), who concluded his own life with this reflection: “A life spent in the service of God and communion with Him, is the most comfortable and pleasant life that one can live in this present world.”

P A R T I

Denominational Funeral and Memorial Services

1

Baptist

Opening Words

But as it is written:

What eye did not see and ear did not hear,
and what never entered the human mind—
God prepared this for those who love Him.
Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, for
the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.
(1 Cor. 2:9–10 HCSB)

LORD, happy is the man You discipline
and teach from Your law
to give him relief from troubled times
until a pit is dug for the wicked.
The LORD will not forsake His people
or abandon His heritage. (Ps. 94:12–14 HCSB)

See how happy the man is God corrects;
so do not reject the discipline of the Almighty. (Job 5:17
HCSB)

Because you have made the LORD—my refuge,
the Most High—your dwelling place,
no harm will come to you;
no plague will come near your tent.
For He will give His angels orders concerning you,
to protect you in all your ways.
They will support you with their hands
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the young lion and the serpent.

Because he is lovingly devoted to Me,
I will deliver him;
I will protect him because he knows My name.
When he calls out to Me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble.
I will rescue him and give him honor. (Ps. 91:9–15 HCSB)

Hymn

A hymn may be sung or read, or suitable poetry may be used instead.

Scripture

Select one or more of the following Scripture passages.

Beloved, let us seek comfort in the assurances of God's Word.

If we would be assured of God's care for us, we need the following words:

The LORD is my shepherd;
there is nothing I lack.
He lets me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He renews my life;
He leads me along the right paths
for His name's sake.
Even when I go through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger,
for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
as long as I live. (Ps. 23 HCSB)

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. And

those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things?

If God is for us, who is against us?

He did not even spare His own Son
but offered Him up for us all;

how will He not also with Him grant us everything?

Who can bring an accusation against God's elect?

God is the One who justifies.

Who is the one who condemns?

Christ Jesus is the One who died,

but even more, has been raised;

He also is at the right hand of God

and intercedes for us.

Who can separate us from the love of Christ?

Can affliction or anguish or persecution

or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written:

Because of You

we are being put to death all day long;

we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.

No, in all these things we are more than victorious
through Him who loved us.

For I am persuaded that not even death or life,
angels or rulers,

things present or things to come, hostile powers,

height or depth, or any other created thing

will have the power to separate us

from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! (Rom.
8:28–39 HCSB)

Then one of the elders asked me, “Who are these people robed in white, and where did they come from?”

I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

Then he told me:

These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

They washed their robes and made them white
in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and they serve Him day and night in His sanctuary.

The One seated on the throne will shelter them:

They will no longer hunger;

they will no longer thirst;

the sun will no longer strike them,

nor will any heat.

For the Lamb who is at the center of the throne
will shepherd them;

He will guide them to springs of living waters,

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev.

7:13–17 HCSB)

If we would be assured of an eternal home, let our hearts be consoled
by these words:

Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me.
In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have
told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and

prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also. (John 14:1–3 HCSB)

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For we say this to you by a revelation from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13–18 HCSB)

Prayer

Having heard God speaking to us in his Word, let us now take our sorrow to him, being assured that he will hear us by the following blessed words:

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! . . . Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you. (James 4:8, 10 HCSB)

Let us pray . . .

Hymn

A hymn may be sung or read, or suitable poetry may be used instead.

Address

If deemed advisable.

Hymn

A hymn may be sung or read, or suitable poetry may be used instead.

Closing Words

The services here are now concluded, and we will proceed to the cemetery where the interment will take place.

Minister takes his place in the lead of the pallbearers and walks from home or church in this order to the funeral vehicles. Upon arrival at the cemetery, the minister again takes his place in the lead of the pallbearers and walks in this order to the grave.

Procession to the Grave

The minister may say the following, as he walks in the lead of the procession.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write: The dead who die in the Lord from now on are blessed.”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “let them rest from their labors, for their works follow them!” (Rev. 14:13 HCSB)

You guide me with Your counsel,
and afterward You will take me up in glory.
Who do I have in heaven but You?
And I desire nothing on earth but You.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart,
my portion forever. (Ps. 73:24–26 HCSB)

Lowering of the Casket

When the casket has been placed on the supports ready for lowering into the grave, the minister takes his stand at the head of the grave. Then he may say as the casket is lowered:

Brothers, I tell you this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and corruption cannot inherit incorruption. Listen! I am telling you a mystery:

We will not all fall asleep,
but we will all be changed,
in a moment, in the blink of an eye,
at the last trumpet.
For the trumpet will sound,
and the dead will be raised incorruptible,

and we will be changed.
For this corruptible must be clothed
with incorruptibility,
and this mortal must be clothed
with immortality.
When this corruptible is clothed
with incorruptibility,
and this mortal is clothed
with immortality,
then the saying that is written will take place:
Death has been swallowed up in victory.
Death, where is your victory?
Death, where is your sting?
Now the sting of death is sin,
and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling
in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
(1 Cor. 15:50–58 HCSB)

Words of Committal

My Friends: Whereas, death hath once more invaded our ranks and removed from the walk of life our beloved brother/sister _____, his/her soul having departed to dwell in “the undiscovered country

from whose bourn no traveler returns,”* it has become our sad duty to commit his/her body to the grave—earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust—and our inspiring privilege to commend his/her soul to our Maker, Father, and Redeemer, in the confident hope of the coming again of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the body from the grave, and the joyous life reserved for the children of light in the realms of glory.

Then the grave may be filled or canopied and decorated with flowers, after which the people may be dismissed by prayer or benediction.

Benediction

“And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. . . . Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Phil. 4:7, 20 HCSB).

James Randolph Hobbs, *The Pastor's Manual* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1962), 21–30. Renewal, 1990, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Adapted with quotations from the King James Version replaced by the Holman Christian Standard Bible, 2009.

*William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1. *Bourn* means small stream.