

Funerals in “Good” Circumstances (believers, normal life, somewhat expected)

1. Parents – Both believers who asked me to do their funerals a few years before their deaths. Plenty of time to think and pray about what to share.
2. Long-time church members – Example of sweet 103-year-old godly lady who lived every day of the 19th century. Plenty of life experience to share with people you have known a long time.

Funerals in “Difficult” Circumstances (unbelievers, brief life or sudden ending, unexpected)

1. Premature death

- Family was told a few days before full-term pregnancy that baby had died in the womb.
- Couple wanted me to come in just after the delivery; cried and prayed with them.
- Funeral – I focused on things the little one never heard (cursing, wicked music, unhappy neighbors screaming, etc.). Now he hears the angels and a “Welcome home.” Also focused on things he never felt (fist punch from unhappy ball player, rude shove, spanking, etc.). Now safe in the arms of Jesus. Spoke from II Sam. 12 at the death of David’s young son. *I shall go to him.* Also noted John 13:7, *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*

2. Violent death

- While sitting in his car on his lunch hour, a Ukrainian man murdered by a deranged man who had been listening to rap music telling him to go out and shoot someone.
- He was a great servant in the church who left behind a wife and four young children.
- Funeral – I spoke from Acts 11:24 on the description of Barnabas, *he was a good man.* I noted the deceased was a loving man, hard-working man, a man of character. While he was indeed a good man, good men don’t go to heaven, only forgiven ones do. Shared the gospel.

3. Tragic death

- 26-year-old neighbor who died from fentanyl overdose. Neighbor waiting for our bathroom light to come on at 5:30 am Sunday. Dad immediately called and told me about the son’s death the night before and asked me to do his funeral.
- As a teen, he attended our Christian school and youth group for a while. Made a profession of faith but wandered from the Lord.
- Funeral – I spoke from James 4:13-15 on the brevity of life, expecting several of his unsaved or wayward friends would be there. I spoke about the deceased’s life and

the fun we had for the many years we were neighbors. I told about his decision for Christ earlier in his life and then preached the Gospel.

4. *Deeply sad death*

- Family who couldn't have children and adopted a couple of sweet young girls. Then God gave them a biological son of their own. At 3 months old, the little fella died of SIDS.
- Funeral – I noted there are things about God we just don't know but focused on the things about God we do know (sovereign, good, gracious, faithful, always does right, etc.) I also focused on what we know about the little infant: made in the image of God, safe in the arms of Jesus, created to glorify God, happier today than anyone on earth ever was, a test of your faith, and a gift to you and the people of Haiti (His parents are very missions, gospel-focused people and wanted all gifts to go to the Haitian mission fund.)
- Funeral 2 – 406 days later we were back at the same cemetery not far from the first gravesite and mourned the death of a premature stillborn daughter. At this funeral, I spoke on the sufferings of Christ and our entering into the fellowship of His sufferings. I focused on the broken world we live in, which produces suffering, but that suffering is momentary, temporary, as *joy comes in the morning* (Ps. 30:5). I ended on Isaiah 61:1-3, *beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, garment of praise for spirit of heaviness.*

Guiding principles at funerals:

1. *Recognize the unique opportunities funerals provide a pastor.*

- Funerals aren't for the dead but for the living. They are unique moments in time that create opportunities to contemplate our own death and eternity.

2. *Address every member in the audience.*

- Bereaved family who are grieving
- Believers who need to be confirmed in their faith
- Unbelievers who need to be confronted with the Gospel

3. *Share meaningful reflections of the deceased.*

- These are personal thoughts/observations that warm the hearts of grieving family and friends.
- BE HONEST. An "empty" eulogy will be hollow and unhelpful.

- If the deceased is a believer, I often ask the family for the Bible of the individual, which can provide helpful, meaningful insights.

4. *Provide hope from the Scripture.*

- The grieving, mourning attenders need and should always be given genuine hope from the Bible.
- Share the hope of the resurrection for believers as well as other promises of God.
- Share the hope in the Gospel for those who may be lost.

5. *Preach the Gospel.*

- Funerals are often very tender times for people.