

Hope and Death

By Lee Yates



No one wants to talk about death, so why not make time to do so in the midst of thinking about new life and resurrection at Easter? Take a road trip to a cemetery, and remember that talking about death won't kill you.

For
Teen Family

Season

Spring / around Memorial Day

Needed

Did You Know worksheet (see last page), Bible, picnic blanket, picnic lunch (optional)

Prepare in Advance

- Parents should discuss this activity before using it with the family.
- Choose a cemetery to visit. It may be a cemetery with family connection or just a local cemetery. Choose a good day for your visit. If desired and if cemetery regulations permit, pack a picnic.
- Make a copy of Did You Know worksheet (see last page) for each person.

Activity Plan

1. Travel together to the cemetery you have chosen. Take your Bible, copies of the Did You Know worksheet, picnic blanket, and if desired, your picnic lunch.
2. At the cemetery, take a walk together. If appropriate, find a good place to sit. Begin your conversation with a short prayer. Below are some words if you need them:

God, death can be an awkward topic and sometimes we'd rather not talk about it at all. Help us be honest and open. Amen.

3. Give each person a copy of the Did You Know worksheet. After giving everyone a chance to read it, use the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - What do you believe happens when a person dies?
 - What is your strongest memory of a funeral?
 - What traditions does our church have for the time when a person dies and for his or her funeral?
 - What does our family usually do at the time of a death?
 - What funeral requests have been made by specific family members?
 - How do you want your life to be remembered and celebrated when you die?
 - What does Jesus' resurrection mean to us?
 - What symbols do we see in this cemetery, perhaps on the grave markers or on signs? What do they represent or teach?
 - How might cemeteries be thought of as places of hope and peace?



4. Open your Bible and read aloud Romans 8:31-35, 38-39, or use the following text. Invite each family member to tell what this Bible passage says to him or her about death.

Romans 8:31-35, 38-39:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

5. Close in prayer. Below are some words if you need them.

Lord, it is never easy to talk about death and funerals, but we did it. Help us be less afraid to talk about things that are important, no matter how awkward or creepy they might be. Give us peace in your promise of life forever in your care. Amen.



Did You Know?

- Most cemeteries place bodies in graves with the head pointing to the West so that on the “day of resurrection” they will see Jesus coming from the East with the dawn. Ancient sun worshipers did the same thing so people could see the sun rise each day.
- Some people think tombstones or grave markers were first used as a way to “weigh down” ghosts so they wouldn’t follow a person home.
- Public landscaping (such as small parks or urban green spaces) often have design elements similar to a cemetery.
- Jewish families place a rock on the grave of a loved one. This tradition may have started as a way of protecting gravesites and a way of keeping a grave visible over time. It echoes biblical examples of stones being used to remember and mark sacred spaces.
- Many people are afraid of cemeteries. Those whose fears are excessive or unreasonable may be diagnosed as having *coimetrophobia*.
- There are some old stories about people hiding in cemeteries because monsters were afraid to enter there.

