



vibrant**faith**

+ Generations Together

In Memorial

Here is a cross-generational session for all members of the congregation designed to talk about death and those who have died. This session is designed to be conducted in about 90 minutes, and can be adapted for a shorter or longer timeframe.

Introduction

This session works well just prior to Memorial Day (May 30), as well as in anticipation of All Saints/All Souls Days (Nov 1-2). Generally, we don't like to talk about death, especially within earshot of children. Yet, death is a part of life, and it's important for all of us to learn healthy ways to think about, talk about it, and embrace our feelings about it. It's also important for us to remember well those who we've loved and who have died. This session provides a great opportunity for the adult community to model to children and teens a healthy, faith-filled view of death.

I. Gather

To begin the session use the following adaptation of the activity The Last Time

Needed

- Bibles, one per family/small group
- Create an open atmosphere that is conducive to talking about death
- Euphemisms on Death. Pick the best 25 or so items from the list at this web site: <https://www.joincake.com/blog/euphemisms-for-death>. Put one item each on a small slip of paper. Have enough slips, one for each participant. (It's okay to have duplicate slips if you have more than 25 participants.) Place the slips in a large bowl and mix them up.
- Newsprint, one half-sheet for each family/small group
- Markers, at least one for each family/small group
- Masking tape, or method for posting newsprint on wall

Activity Plan

1. Gather all participants into one large group. Introduce today's session by saying the following:

Generally, we don't like to talk about death, especially within earshot of children. Yet, death is a part of life, and it's important for all of us to learn healthy ways to think about, talk about it, and embrace our feelings about it. It's also important for us to remember well those who we've loved and who have died. Today we will explore and model a healthy, faith-filled view of death.

So let us begin with this short prayer:

Gracious God, teach us to number our days so that we might live fully in each of them. Amen.

2. Ask participants to form family groups or small groups of 4-5 persons. Ask the youngest person in each group to come forward to the bowl of slips and take out the number of slips as there are in his or her family/small group. That person should give one slip to each person in the family/group.
3. In family/small groups, go around and have each person read aloud the euphemism for death on his or her slip. Someone should explain any item that may not be understood. Discuss how these phrases are an expression of our feelings about death. Ask: why do you think we have so many phrases for death? Why are reluctant to say the words dead, death, died, dying?
4. Have someone in each family/small group read aloud from their Bible Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Then discuss these questions: Which activities happen more than once? Which happen only once? For which can a person prepare? Which are most often experienced best just as they happen? Are there any a person might want to accomplish alone?
5. Now, focus on verse 2, "a time to die." "Dying well" has been a tradition of the church, a practice that prepares us for our own end. Considering our own death allows us to identify and engage in activities that are faith driven. Describe what you believe "dying well" would be like.
6. Ask each group to make a list of things that describe "dying well" which a person would want to experience, and write these things on the half-sheet of newsprint.
7. Invite each group to share with the entire group one item from their list (that hasn't yet been mentioned). Ask one person from each group to post their newsprint list on the wall.
8. Conclude this part of the session by affirming each group for overcoming the natural reluctance to talk about death and for getting to the point of being able to articulate what it means to die well. Now, invite them to the next activity.

II. Grow

Use the following adaptation of the activity called Hope and Death

Needed

- Bibles, one for each family/small group
- Did You Know worksheet, one for each family/small group.

Activity Plan

1. Ask participants to remain in their family/small groups. Ask someone from each group to read aloud the text on the worksheet. (You can post this information on a PowerPoint slide to reinforce what is read aloud.)
2. Ask groups to use the following questions to guide their discussion about death, dying, funerals and the like. They don't have to address all the questions. Encourage them to choose questions appropriate for the ages of persons in the family/group. (Again, you should post these questions on a PowerPoint slide for all to see.)
 - 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 a 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?
3. When groups have had sufficient time for discussions, bring them back into one large group. Invite a few comments to be shared with the whole group about what they have been discussing.
 4. Read aloud to the whole group from your Bible, 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?

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. Conclude this part of the session in prayer.

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.

III. Go Forth

To conclude this session, use the following adaptation of the activity called Remembering Those Who Have Died

Needed

- Bible – one for each family/small group
- What I Miss Most worksheet - one for each person
- Pens or pencils
- YouTube music video Live Like You are Dying by Tim McGraw,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 9TShIMkQnc>.

Activity Plan

1. Ask participants to gather again in their family or small groups. When groups are settled, read aloud for all to hear:

Psalm 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Then voice this short prayer:

God, we remember those who have died and who meant so much to us. Be with us as we recall how their lives touched ours and celebrate the relationships we had with them. Amen.

2. Give each person a copy of the What I Miss Most worksheet and a pen or pencil. Play some reflective music as everyone works individually to complete their worksheets. Young children may need some assistance.
3. Ask family/group members to take turns telling about what they wrote on the worksheet. Ask follow-up questions, like:
 - How often do you think about this person?
 - What reminds you of this person?
 - How do you feel about this person now? Do you feel sad? Grateful? Another feeling?

Note: Be sensitive to each person's memory. Family members may have different experiences of the same person. Honor what each one remembers, and celebrate his or her relationship with the person. Also, depending on how recently the person died, this activity may uncover intense feelings. This is normal and okay. Don't rush someone's grieving process.

4. Encourage family/small groups to discuss how to commemorate each person that was remembered and written about on the worksheet. Give some examples such as, you might have a picture of the person at your dinner table on Memorial Day or All Saints Day, or light a candle in his or her memory. If there's a gravestone marker, you may want to visit it. Do what each person would find most meaningful.
5. To conclude this session gather everyone back into one large group. Offer some concluding comments that reiterate that death is a part of life, congratulate them on "going there" with this topic, and remember that God is always with us and with those who have died.

Play the YouTube music video Live Like You are Dying by Tim McGraw,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TShIMkQnc>.

If you are doing this activity in advance of Memorial Day, give each family or household a copy of the activity called Memorial Day Remembrances and encourage them to do it together.

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.

The Last Time

By Chip Borgstadt

Spring brings hope for new life, but it is also a time to prepare for endings: seeds die in the ground to bring forth the new. Annual springtime conversations on our final days is an affirmation of faith and a gift of love to family and friends.

For

Adult / Couple

Season

Spring

Needed

Bible, willingness to talk about death.

Prepare in Advance

Consider friends and family members' recent losses as you find a neutral time to talk about your hopes and expectations concerning death.



Activity Plan

1. Begin with prayer.

Gracious God, teach us to number our days so that we might live fully in each of them. Amen.

2. With friends and/or loved ones, play a guessing game where you draw various expressions we use to avoid saying "death." They might include "bought the farm," "kicked the bucket," and so on. Discuss how these phrases are an expression of our feelings about death.
3. From your Bible, read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Which activities happen more than once? Which happen only once? For which can a person prepare? Which are most often experienced best just as they happen? Are there any a person might want to accomplish alone?
4. Focus on verse 2, "a time to die." "Dying well" has been a tradition of the church, a practice that prepares us for our own end. Considering our own death allows us to identify and engage in activities that are faith driven. Describe what you believe "dying well" would be like.
5. Make a list of things that describe "dying well" which a person would want to experience. How might that person prepare for those things to be in place?
6. Hold your calendar or to-do list and pray that what you do will reflect your faith and allow you to die well when your time comes. This practice can be done weekly to help provide balance in your activities.

Additional Optional Activity

7. Watch the video of Tim McGraw singing [Live Like You Are Dying](#). Discuss the things that you would do if you knew that you had a terminal illness. Then discuss what difference it makes knowing that you will probably be dying soon. How might we always live like we are dying so that when the time comes we can die well?

Hope and Death

By Lee Yates



Season

Spring / around Memorial Day

Needed

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

Did You Know worksheet, 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 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.*

Remembering Those Who Have Died

By Jolene Roehlkepartain

November 1 is All Saints Day

For

Teen Family

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, What I Miss Most worksheet, pens or pencils



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Prepare in Advance

Mark your Bible to Psalm 147:3 and Matthew 5:4.

Make a copy of the What I Miss Most worksheet for each family member.

Activity Plan

1. Say this prayer aloud to begin:

God, we remember those who have died and who meant so much to us. Be with us as we recall how their lives touched ours and celebrate the relationships we had with them. Amen.

2. Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 147:3 from your Bible (or see the text below). Then have another person read aloud Matthew 5:4. Discuss: When have you felt brokenhearted? How did God work through other people to “bind up your wounds” or comfort you?

Psalm 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

3. Give each person a copy of the What I Miss Most worksheet and a pen or pencil. Play some music you all like as you work individually to complete your worksheets.
4. Ask family members to take turns telling about what they wrote on the worksheet. Ask follow-up questions, like:
 - How often do you think about this person?
 - What reminds you of this person?
 - How do you feel about this person now? Do you feel sad? Grateful? Another feeling?

Note: Be sensitive to each person’s memory. Family members may have different experiences of the same person. Honor what each one remembers, and celebrate his or her relationship with the person. Also, depending on how recently the person died, this activity may uncover intense feelings. This is normal and okay. Don’t rush someone’s grieving process.

5. Talk with each person about how to commemorate the person he or she wrote about on the worksheet. For example, you might have a picture of the person at your dinner table on All Saints Day or light a candle in his or her memory. If there’s a gravestone marker, you may want to visit it. Do what each person would find most meaningful.
6. If you’re looking for rituals to celebrate the lives of your loved ones, consider checking out the book [*Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and Mourning Death*](#) by Sarah York.

What I Miss Most

1. Take a moment to recall family members, neighbors, or friends who have died. Which person do you miss the most today? Why?
2. In what ways did this person touch your life? What did he or she do or say that meant a lot to you?
3. What do you remember most clearly about this person? (Was it something he or she wore, the way he or she talked, or something this person did?)
4. What did you learn from this person?
5. If you could have another conversation with this person, what would you like to say?

Memorial Day Remembrances

By Christy Huffman



Make time amidst beginning-of-summer picnics and celebrations to honor the sacrifices others have made on our behalf.

For

Young Family

Season

Spring, Memorial Day Weekend

Needed

Small national flags or small bouquets of flowers

Prepare in Advance

Prior to Memorial Day weekend, conduct an Internet search to find the nearest veteran's cemetery. An alternate idea is to visit the gravesite of a member of the armed services who died in combat and was a member of your faith community. Or, find out where the gravesites of veterans are located in your local cemetery.

Activity Plan

1. Before you gather with families and friends to celebrate the unofficial beginning of summer, take a moment to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their nation. It is not necessary to go into detail with young children about death or war; simply explain to them that you are taking time this weekend to honor men and women who died in war so that your family and every family in your country might live in freedom.
2. Choose a time over the Memorial Day weekend to visit a veteran's cemetery, or to visit the gravesites of veterans in your community cemetery.
3. Once you arrive at the location, give each family member a couple of flags or some small bouquets of flowers. Encourage each family member to place a flag or flowers near the grave markers of fallen service members. Adults will need to help small children place them respectfully. *Please note: There may be family members at the gravesites over Memorial Day weekend. Remember to honor their space and time at the grave of their loved one.*
4. Before you get back in your car, gather and pray aloud:

Gracious God we remember and give thanks for the men and women who died in war so that everyone in our nation might live in freedom. Thank you for the promise of new life that you give to all through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.