

Funeral Scriptures: Bible Passages for Funerals and Memorials

Bible passages for funerals and memorial services, grouped by pastoral situation — sudden loss, long illness, comfort for the family, hope of resurrection — with notes on when each one fits.

The Anchor Passages

PSALM 23 (ESV)

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

The most-read funeral scripture. Its power is that it walks through death, not around it. Read it slowly — it does its own work.

JOHN 14:1-6 (ESV)

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also... I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus' own words spoken directly into grief. The tenderness is in the imperative: 'Let not your hearts be troubled' — permission and comfort in one line.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:54-57 (ESV)

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' 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.”

The resurrection declaration. Read as the passage that reframes what the family is walking through — not denial of grief, but grief with a horizon.

Comfort in Grief

PSALM 34:18 (ESV)

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

A single line that meets the family exactly where they are. Especially powerful in the opening moments of the service, before anything else is said.

MATTHEW 5:4 (ESV)

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Jesus' own beatitude for grief. Names mourning as a blessed state rather than something to be gotten through.

PSALM 46:1-3 (ESV)

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.”

For sudden or untimely deaths — meets shock without demanding acceptance.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23 (ESV)

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

A verse of hope drawn from a book of grief. Its context — Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem — makes the hope credible rather than sentimental.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 (ESV)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

Frames the mourners themselves as those who will one day comfort others. A gift of purpose given quietly in the middle of grief.

The Hope of Resurrection

JOHN 11:25-26 (ESV)

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus' words at Lazarus' tomb. The question at the end — 'Do you believe this?' — is the pastoral heart of the funeral itself.

REVELATION 21:3-4 (ESV)

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

The final vision. Read as the closing scripture before the benediction — it moves the congregation's eyes from what they have lost to what is coming.

ROMANS 8:38-39 (ESV)

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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.”

The passage that begins by naming death itself as the first thing that cannot separate us from God's love. For a Christian funeral, this belongs somewhere in the service.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14 (ESV)

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

Paul's careful phrasing — 'not grieve as others do who have no hope' — validates Christian grief while distinguishing it. Christians grieve; they simply grieve with hope.

Graveside and Committal

PSALM 121:7-8 (ESV)

“The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”

For the family standing at the grave. A blessing over their going out from this place.

ECCLESIASTES 12:7 (ESV)

“The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

The traditional committal verse. Names honestly what is happening at the grave without stripping it of dignity.

JOB 19:25-26 (ESV)

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God."

A graveside confession of resurrection hope from the mouth of a man who had lost everything. Powerful when spoken over the casket as it is lowered.

How to Use These in a Service

Choose based on the family, not the formula. A funeral for a 92-year-old grandmother who died in her sleep after a long life of faith calls for different passages than a funeral for a young father who died suddenly. The scriptures above are grouped by pastoral situation so you can match the text to the actual grief in the room.

Structure: two to three passages, not five. A typical service uses one Old Testament reading (usually Psalm 23 or Psalm 34:18), one Gospel or epistle passage centered on Christ and resurrection (John 14, John 11, or 1 Corinthians 15), and often a short committal verse at the graveside. Reading five or six scriptures overloads the service and dilutes the impact of any single one.

Speak the honest passages honestly. Do not skip past 'the valley of the shadow of death,' 'let not your hearts be troubled,' or 'death is swallowed up in victory.' Each acknowledges the reality of what has happened before it declares the hope. Comfort that ignores the loss will not comfort. Read slowly enough that the family can actually hear the words.

Sudden and untimely deaths. Avoid passages that emphasize a 'long life well lived' or that require the family to make sense of the loss quickly. Lead with Psalm 46:1, Psalm 34:18, and Romans 8:38-39 — passages that name God's nearness and refusal to be separated from us without demanding that the family reach any particular emotional destination.

Funerals of unbelievers or where faith was unclear. Focus scriptures on God's character (Psalm 23, Lamentations 3:22-23, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4) and comfort for the living, rather than on declarations about the deceased's eternal state. This is honest, pastoral, and avoids either false assurance or unnecessary condemnation in a moment where neither serves the family.

Frequently Asked

What is a good scripture to read at a funeral?

For most funerals, either Psalm 23 or John 14:1-6 works as an anchor reading — both are familiar enough to comfort, weighty enough to carry the moment. Pair with one shorter passage (often 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 or Revelation 21:3-4) that speaks specifically to resurrection hope.

What is a good short scripture for a funeral?

Psalm 34:18 — 'The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.' Or John 11:25 — 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Both are single lines that hold enormous weight and can be spoken at a graveside or as a closing pronouncement.

What is a good Old Testament scripture for a funeral?

Psalm 23 is the most-read Old Testament funeral scripture for good reason — it walks through the valley of the shadow of death and comes out on the other side of God's presence and provision. For a funeral where grief is especially raw, Lamentations 3:22-23 or Psalm 34:18 speaks directly to the family's pain.

What is a good New Testament scripture for a funeral?

John 14:1-6 is Jesus' own words of comfort to his disciples facing his death, and it addresses grief head-on with the promise of a prepared place. For a funeral of a Christian believer, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 declares death defeated. Both work as the main reading.

How many scriptures should be read at a funeral?

Two to three is typical: one Old Testament (usually a psalm), one Gospel or epistle passage centered on hope of resurrection, and often a short benediction-style closing verse at the graveside. More than three tends to overload the service and dilute the impact of any single passage.

What scripture do you read when someone dies suddenly?

Psalm 46:1 — 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' — meets the family where they are without pretending the loss makes sense yet. Pair with Romans 8:38-39 for a longer anchor. Avoid passages that emphasize a 'long life well lived' when the death was sudden or untimely.

Building this Sunday's service?

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