

When You Have Lost a Loved One

Please accept our condolences for your loss. Paul said in his letter to the Romans that one way to put love into action is to, "mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15) We hope to be a loving community for you in this time of grief and mourning.

SUPPORT

In the early days of your loss, it may be difficult to reach out for support, but when the time comes, we are here for you. We have a prayer team dedicated to intercessory prayer and you can receive prayer in person following any of our weekend or midweek services. When you're ready, connect with understanding people who can come alongside you in this season with hope and support through Peer Counseling or our GriefShare group.

- PRAYER REQUEST: <https://www.desertvineyard.org/prayer>
- PEER COUNSELING REQUEST: <https://www.desertvineyard.org/peer-counseling-request>
- GRIEFSHARE GROUP: <https://desertvineyard.churchcenter.com/groups/dv-small-groups/griefshare>

MEMORIAL SERVICES

At the Desert Vineyard we consider it a privilege to help you plan and hold a memorial service for your loved one. For many, memorial services are an important part of the grieving process and a way to gather meaningful people together to honor the passing of someone close to you. Unlike some other faith traditions, we do not hold fast to particular rituals or liturgies that must be completed in specific way, by specific people, or on a specific timetable. Rather, we view the service as a celebration of life and encourage personal sharing by friends and loved ones as one of the most valuable parts of the service. Please read on to learn about planning a service or how to honor a loved one without a service.

PERSONAL AND MEANINGFUL: One option is to plan a less conventional way to memorialize your loved one. Below you will find tools to plan a service at home or another favorite location. Since a pastor is not required, you may choose a time, day and location that is best for you and your guests. Please use these prayers, scriptures, and other suggestions to help get you started, but feel free to create a service that is personal and meaningful to you.

AT THE DESERT VINEYARD CHURCH: If your preference is a service at the Desert Vineyard, officiated by one of our pastors, we would consider it a privilege to join with you to honor your loved one. You can request a memorial service by calling 661-945-2777 and our caring reception staff can begin the process with you today.

Due to the changing guidelines for gatherings in LA County, our services will be adapted to meet public health recommendations at the time they are scheduled. We can offer more intimate, outdoor services (for now) or can delay the service for your loved one until a later date. Please call for current information.

PLANNING YOUR OWN PERSONAL & MEANINGFUL SERVICE

Most modern services include some scripture reading, worship or other meaningful music, slideshow of photos from throughout the life of your loved one, a time to share stories about your loved one, and a message of hope from a pastor, chaplain or friend. In addition, the service will typically open and close with a time of prayer and may include some refreshments or a shared meal. Each element is an opportunity to personalize the service to honor your loved one.

Prayers are just the words we speak to God. Often, the most meaningful prayers are simple and from the heart. In times of grief and stress, however, it can be difficult to find the right words for the moment. Thankfully there is a long tradition of reading (or taking inspiration from) the prayers found in scripture and those of church leaders throughout the centuries. Below are some thoughtful prayers for memorials.

There are lots of choices for the **scriptures** read at a memorial service. If the deceased has a Bible with highlighted passages, a journal that refers to favorite verses, or even social media posts about encouraging scriptures, those are a great place to start. It is powerful to share something that was meaningful to your loved one. In addition, there are many passages of scripture that offer comfort to those in mourning and hope for believers. Some comforting and hopeful passages can be found below.

Music, photos and other memorabilia, flowers and food can all help complete the service. Similar to scriptures, the most obvious choices are what you know was meaningful to your loved one. There are also many traditional choices that can bring comfort and hope. A list of songs often chosen follows.

If you are planning a more unconventional service, there are lots of **other activities** you could choose to honor your loved one. Here are a few ideas, but feel free to think creatively.

- Organize an act of service rather than a memorial service. Invite family and friends to participate in or donate to a ministry or charity important to your loved one. Let everyone know how and why your loved one valued the particular service opportunity and encourage people to join in as a way to honor and remember them.
- Think outside (literally) and visit a favorite beach or walk a favorite trail together with others who enjoyed those activities with your loved one. Sing or play songs they loved and read a passage of scripture or poem while enjoying a beautiful view.
- Watch a favorite movie together, pausing often to talk about the part that made her laugh hysterically or the scene that always made him cry. Be sure to serve their favorite snack foods and ask each person to share a memory. Consider writing the memories in a journal for the spouse or children of the deceased.
- Create a joyful setting that includes everyone by throwing a party on your loved one's birthday or planning a family reunion at a time when everyone can be there. This gives everyone plenty of time to arrange travel and collect photos and memories. Use this time to make a good memory, and maybe even a new tradition.

PRAYERS

TRADITIONAL BLESSING: May the love of God and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ bless and console us and gently wipe every tear from our eyes: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CONTEMPORARY MODEL: Dear Lord, we are so grateful that you have made us all in your own image, giving us gifts and talents with which to serve you. Thank you for (loved one's name) life, and all the years we shared with him/her. We lift him/her to you today, in honor of the good we saw in him/her and the love we felt from him/her. Please give us the strength to leave him/her in your care, in the knowledge of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen

ADAPTED TRADITIONAL: May we hear your voice each time you speak, in the big and small ways, in correction and encouragement. Help us to acknowledge you even in our suffering. In our grief, we humbly request your blessing, not just for those who have gone to your side, but for ourselves, that we need not suffer such loss to remain ever mindful of you!

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen.

NUMBERS 6:24-26 - "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift His countenance upon you, and give you peace."

TRADITIONAL: Dear Lord, You are the Father of all mercies Who cares for all Your people with an everlasting love. You are the God of all comfort Who consoles all those that are suffering the death of a loved one. You are the God of all peace who has promised to pour Your perfect peace into the hearts of Your children Who are going through the pain and suffering that the loss of a precious loved one brings.

Oh Lord I pray that You would become their strength in this time of loss; their hope in this time of bereavement; their joy in this time of sorrow and their perfect peace in the turmoil that their heart must be facing.

Thank You that the sting of death has been broken forever and the curse of the grave has been destroyed through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ who has broken forever the power of death and hell, for all who trust in the name of the only begotten Son of God

Speak into the hearts of all Your children that are mourning at this time and let them not mourn as those that have no hope – but Lord for those that do not yet know You as the Savior Who died for them, so that by believing they might have everlasting life – we pray that they will come to know and accept You as their Savior and find their perfect rest in You – in Jesus name we pray, Amen

SCRIPTURES

PSALMS 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

JOHN 11:25-26 - "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

MATTHEW 5:3-4 - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14 - Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

ISAIAH 40:30-31(AMP) - Even youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, but those who wait for the Lord [who expect, look for, and hope in Him] will gain new strength *and* renew their power; they will lift up their wings [and rise up close to God] like eagles [rising toward the sun]; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not grow tired.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 - And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-57 - Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

JOB 19:25-27 (TLB) - But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And I know that after this body has decayed, this body shall see God! Then he will be on my side! Yes, I shall see him, not as a stranger, but as a friend! What a glorious hope!

PSALMS 23 - The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, 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. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

MUSIC

- How Great Thou Art: traditional hymn by Carl Boberg
- Amazing Grace: traditional hymn by John Newton
- I Can Only Imagine: worship song by Mercy Me
- Heaven Song: worship song by Phil Wickham
- Ten Thousand Reasons: worship song by Matt Redman
- Ain't No Grave: gospel song by Claude Ely
- Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: old spiritual by Wallis Willis
- Somewhere Over the Rainbow: popular song by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg
- Dance with My Father: popular song by Luther Vandross
- Temporary Home: popular song by Carrie Underwood

HONORING A LOVED ONE WITHOUT A SERVICE

It is difficult to think of missing the memorial service for a loved one because you are ill, unable to travel, or any other challenging circumstance. The sense of loss is even greater and you may feel alone and heartbroken. Likewise, you may feel emotional about not being able to plan or host a service for your loved one due to those same challenging circumstances or others. Do not despair. A service is not necessary to honor and memorialize your loved one. Moreover, God is with you, right in the midst of your circumstances and, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (PSALM 34:18)

UNABLE TO ATTEND: If you are unable to attend a service, you can still feel part of the process by composing a letter to be read at the service, corresponding with friends and family about memories and anecdotes, and contributing photos or flowers that will be enjoyed at the service. Be honest about what you are actually able to do and the budget you have, if that will be a factor. Ask if there is a person of contact who is helping the family to manage details and then communicate directly with them about your contributions. Also, there is great value in a card or call in the weeks and months following the service when a grieving family will appreciate knowing they are still in your thoughts and prayers.

Perhaps you are not able to attend the service because, at the time of their passing, you were estranged from your loved one or their family. In that case, you may take the opportunity to honor your loved one by attempting to make amends and/or reconcile strained relationships. Tread carefully, because grief can amplify feelings of anger or disappointment within relationships that are strained. Lead with your apologies and condolences, then wait for the family to let you know if they are receptive. The process may take months or years, or it may never really start; either way you have honored your loved one.

NO SERVICE: If there will not be a service, you have an opportunity to honor your loved one in a special way that is particular to the relationship you shared. Keep in mind some of the elements of a traditional memorial services like scripture readings, prayers, music, and sharing memories. If you know some favorites of your loved one, use those. If not, some of the scriptures, prayers, and songs listed above might be helpful.

Then, be creative about incorporating these into a mindful time of memorial or new traditions that honor your loved one as part of your daily living. Here are just a few ideas to inspire your own:

- Write a letter to your loved one. Be specific about the ways they were important to you: what did you enjoy about their presence, what did you learn from them, what is your favorite memory? If you have regrets or apologies, include those too. When you are finished, read the letter aloud, allowing the tears and laughter to come along with the words. Feel the joy and the sorrow together; you are sad because you had this special relationship with them. Say goodbye. Thank God for the time you got to have with your loved one and ask him to care for them now (use your own words or one of the prayers above).

If appropriate, send your letter to the spouse or child of the deceased. Alternatively, you can send your letter to God (sort of). Letters addressed to God are routed to Jerusalem, Israel where the Israeli postal service then delivers the letters to a unique address, the cracks and crevasses of the Western, or Wailing, Wall where prayers and messages to God have been left for thousands of years.

- Spend time appreciating some of the things that were special to your loved one. Whether it is music, scripture, movies, a cup of tea, or a particular hobby or holiday, you can honor their memory by enjoying what brought them joy. Set aside a whole day to participate in several activities, or add some of these special things to your daily life. You can adjust these activities to suit you and your circumstances. For example, if your loved one enjoyed bird watching trips, you could simply enjoy the singing of birds out your window while thanking God that he brought them close and that each time you hear them you are reminded of that special person.
- Support a ministry or charity that had significance for your loved one. Similar to finding joy in the activities your loved one enjoyed, you can have an impact in a community that was important to them while also feeling close to and honoring them. Make a one-time gift to the church or club they were a part of, or consider joining one in your own community. Go pet some dogs at the local shelter, run a 5k, buy some Girl Scout cookies, sponsor a child to go to camp, the possibilities are endless. As you interact with the ministry or charity, let them know why you were inspired to do so and talk about your loved one by name. Later, when you're at home nursing your sore muscles or snacking on cookies, be mindful of your gratitude for the experience of the day and the companionship of your friend. Express your thanks to God in prayer.