

MEMORIALIZING the DEAD
PREACHING to the LIVING

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A Resource Manual for Christian Clergy

JAMES SAXMAN

REDEMPTION  PRESS

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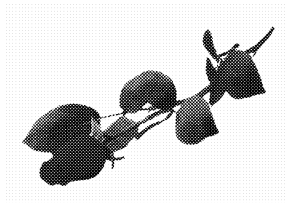
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ISBN 978-1-63232-456-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2003109100



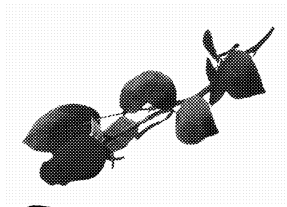
To David Allison

By the end of life, all have a story to be told. To my knowledge, no one escapes unscathed. This would be a sad human epitaph were it not for the undeniable biblical revelation that the “downside of life” is the essence of the sanctification process in Christ.

‘Tis mystery all, it is for our good. So too, is death. For the redeemed, the worst of all has been transformed into the glorious entrance into life eternal with Christ Jesus.

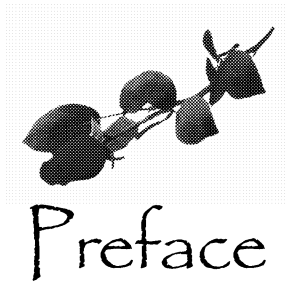
To know and believe this, and then to die well, is life.

This book is dedicated to my special friend, David Allison, who though being the recipient of a more-than-fair-share of God’s mysterious providential “good chastenings,” persevered unto the end to prove his calling (Hebrews 11:27). His journey directed him to the spiritual experience of finding New Covenant life and joy in Christ which releases the soul from bondage and gives ultimate meaning to an otherwise sin-tainted world, and then, to die well. Thank you, David, for taking the time to pass this on to me.



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Preface

MEET THE AUTHOR

Credentials

If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.

—Anonymous

Some years ago I had a plan for my life. It hasn't gone as I thought it would. Not bad, just different. In college I had a good friend who could not wait to get to The Wharton School of Business in Philadelphia. He used to say that the clout which a post-graduate degree from that school carried was like nothing else in business. Today he is a seven-figure businessman working in Manhattan and living in pristine suburban Connecticut with his neighbor Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. I guess he was right; credentials are important.

When I pick up a book to look it over, it is not long before I flip to the back jacket to see who the author is who is demanding my twenty dollars' worth of attention. A legitimate academic pedigree should mean that the author knows his subject. True enough, credentials say that we have paid our dues in the rigors of academia, written more papers than anyone would want to read, and tested well enough to satisfy the demands of formal education. But formal education without real life application is shallow at best. Degrees are only a part of the story.

What really rounds out the equation is, “On what road has God taken us to make theory reality? How successful have we been in life?” Here is my story.

I was born and raised outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and at an early age, developed a rather odd fascination and curiosity for the funeral industry and death and dying. It probably stemmed from two factors outside of my life that I believe were completely within God’s directive hand.

Number one was that as a child I was taken to a funeral home to view the body of a family friend who had passed away. Subsequently, whether from fear of the dead or just plain weirdness, I do not know; but “funeralization” became something I wanted to know more about. Though uncomfortable with that initial experience, I think I was also struck by other issues: the preserving of the dead, the social necessity of the event, and moreover, the entire process of memorialization. I had many questions and this curiosity stuck with me for the days and years to come.

The second influence was when I worked one summer mowing grass in a nearby cemetery with the son of a local funeral director. During the monotony of mowing we memorized the names of long-time residents. There were a number of celebrities—Elizabeth Taylor, James Taylor, James Stewart; not the real ones, but our local versions. A lot of jokes and stories about the dead are shared when you work in a cemetery. It’s boring work pushing a lawn mower past the same gravestones over and over. The mind wanders.

My friend lived with his family on the second floor of the funeral home. Eerie to some, but not to me. So in order to visit him, I needed to be in the funeral home. You are privileged to see and learn much about the dead when you hang around a mortuary. Later, I worked summers waxing cars, answering phones, going on removals, whatever needed to be done. They were good folks.

Because of these opportunities I was exposed more and more to the funeral industry. My fascination grew.

After receiving an undergraduate degree, I attended Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science where I was an honors graduate in 1970. An apprenticeship followed, and, after successfully passing the National Board exam, I became a “Licensed Funeral Director and Embalmer in the State of Pennsylvania, being entitled to all the Rights, Privileges, Honors and Marks of Distinction thereto pertaining.” Following my apprenticeship, I

was employed for a time as a diener (pathologist's assistant), assisting on post mortem examinations (autopsies) at the Milton Hershey Medical Center. This provided even more exposure to the dead, but from a very different perspective.

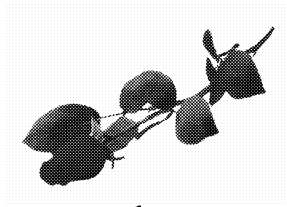
In 1975, as my mother put it, "I got religion." Via conversion and convinced of a divine call, I moved to the northwestern United States and attended seminary, graduating from Western Reformed Seminary in Tacoma, Washington. In 1982, while in seminary, I was employed by a rather large funeral home as a follow-up grief counselor heading up a biblically based program dealing with death, dying, and bereavement with family members who had lost loved ones. An unexpected by-product of this position was that I became the house chaplain for families who had no attachment to a local church and yet wanted a minister to officiate at their loved one's service.

Also, since I was working within the boundaries of funeral service, I came to know many of the local funeral directors. Understanding that I was working with the bereaved, they would often call me to officiate at services of their un-churched families as well. One minister calls it "preaching generic funerals." The result of all this was that since 1982 I have officiated at over twelve hundred memorial and funeral services. And while I will admit that I have come to embrace a somewhat repetitive general pattern for conducting these services, I have also learned that every service is unique in its individuality and its diversity. People live life differently from one another. People die for many different reasons and in varying situations.

Serving as an independent chaplain for people during the trial of a death experience has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Because of that, I have written this book in an attempt to share what I have learned with others.

At times I have queried my friends, "What do you get if you cross a funeral director with a preacher?" And the answer: "You get a preacher who officiates at funerals." That is what I have become. It wasn't my original plan, but it seems to have been God's plan.

And so, I come before you as a funeral director/clergy person with a rich experience and perspective on a very practical issue that is constantly before us in ministry: *Memorializing the Dead and Preaching to the Living*.



Introduction

Why Read this Book?

Over the years of reading many books, I have formulated a simple rule: a book must make me read it. I will give nearly anything a try, but within about thirty pages or so, it must capture me. It must reach into my being and plead, “Read me, I have interest, I have value.” I no longer feel obligated (as I once did) to painstakingly pore over a bad book until completion. The days of laboring out of dutiful devotion to some perceived principle of perseverance are behind me.

Now I admit that perhaps I’ve missed a few “late-bloomers” because of this rule.

It’s like walking out of the ballpark in the seventh inning, trailing by five runs, and hearing on the car radio that the home team rallied to pull out a win. Sometimes it happens, but seldom. If you ask me how it is that I’ve come to this view, it is simple.

By and large it has been the axiom of Solomon, “. . . of the making of many books there is no end . . .” that has driven me to this position. So many books, and so little time. If you then are like me, you might be asking yourself the legitimate question, “Why should I read this one?”

The old maxim in book writing says: “If you want to be successful, write about something you know.” Hear my confession. I do not consider myself to be a writer. A writer to me is a person who is gifted and passionate about the art of writing. He loves it; he lives for it. He does it nearly every day of his life. I cannot claim that. What I do claim is to have written this book, a book about something that I know.

My motive for writing grew out of the conviction that God had brought me on a path which, almost in spite of myself, had qualified me to tell others about that which I knew. I had come to the point of feeling a sense of duty to share some things that would be helpful to ministers and others who would want or need to read it. I would dare to call it the delightfully complex and unfathomable providence of God working on my conscience to cause me to forge ahead in compiling a resource tool for clergy.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!

—Romans 11:33

Since 1982 the over one thousand funeral/memorial services at which I have officiated have been quite varied: natural and unnatural causes, suicide, murder, AIDS, SIDS, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and cancer. For all types and ages: veterans, leukemic children, too-young tragedies, wealthy, poor, dearly loved and sadly forgotten. There are many different ways to die.

In 1997 I was encouraged by a friend (funeral director) that since I had “gotten good” at this thing (officiating at services), maybe I should write a book. At the same time it was occurring to me that I had arrived at a place where I actually did have something to say that would be helpful to others. I realized that in the midst of all these services, I had been forced to carve out a pattern for a service that would work for any situation, without compromising the principle duty of the servant of God, i.e. to advance the message of the gospel (a tension which I will address later in this book). Realizing that I had been fortunate to accumulate a great wealth of experience in these situations, and at the encouragement of my funeral director friends, I became smitten in conscience to make a disciplined effort to package this knowledge in order to help others.

For most of us, our theological academic experience was both challenging and thrilling. When we were turned loose into the real world, however, we found that there are some skills that can truly be learned only in the line of duty. Such is the case with our topic. Compare your experience with mine and consider these reasons for compiling this resource manual.

1. In a course on pastoral theology in seminary, only a small portion was devoted to “The Funeral.” Most of my seminary friends can't remember much about any-

thing we covered in formal education in this area. Topics such as grief management, counseling in the context of terminal illness, is embalming necessary, cremation vs. earth burial, the value of viewing, and so on were never touched upon. These are the subjects on which people in churches will confront their pastors; the issues you “cut your teeth on” in the real world. We have to conclude that *our training in this area was perhaps insufficient*. And to constantly refresh ourselves in practical theology by way of new and challenging thoughts is always a healthy exercise.

2. *Our capabilities can be stretched by another’s experiences*. Handling the funeral/memorialization process is a bit like parenting. By the time you get good at it, the kids have grown and are gone. In the average clergy career, a minister will conduct 100 services, more or less. But it generally takes an entire life to amass this number. We ask, “What can we do to cut down that learning curve?” Maybe a book would help?

Also, we learn that although our ultimate message remains constant (gospel), the circumstances surrounding each individual’s life are always different and multiple. For example, to officiate at the service of a thirty-year-old suicide in the context of AIDS is quite different from the death of a dear ninety-year-old praying saint of the church. God’s Word assures us that as we are exposed to and share with one another our varied experiences, iron is sharpening iron. My hope is that my experiences may prove fruitful for all who digest this manual.

3. I am convinced that some ministers have not fully appreciated that, as in all areas of life, so too God, in death, allows us to see His hand open doors of *opportunity to advance His truth*. Death sometimes provides the opportune time to help people when they are most fragile and vulnerable and gives us the chance to win their hearts. Though not an absolute promise, it is not uncommon for people to seek God when they are in trials. As servants of God, we should be ready to be used—*carpe memento*, seize the moment!
4. Finally, it is my conviction that the clergy/funeral director alliance must constantly be viewed as a *cooperative effort* to serve the community. We are the team of professionals who are called upon to help people when they are truly in their greatest point of helplessness and pain. Shame on us if we do not work well together. I trust my book will enhance that union.

And so to answer the question, “Why should I read this book?” Simply put, the book has something to say which will have great practical value to those who choose to use it

as a tool for their calling in serving people in the crisis of death. Some time ago I attended a symposium by a noted pastor/grief guru whose presentation disturbed me. He left us with four formidable challenges for the funeral industry in the days ahead. The second of those was “The Challenge of the Clergy,” in which he outlined a need for a changing paradigm regarding memorialization. His premise was that since pastors as a whole have largely ignored the legitimate ministerial concerns of proper eulogy and bereavement care (especially to the non-churched), the funeral industry should reclaim the ground that was “given over” to the clergy. He actually made the statement, “We’ve handed it over to the clergy and they’ve ruined it; we need to take it back.” He is now training funeral directors and independents to be lay ministers in funeral service. His attitude disturbed me because it seemed to me to be quite alarmist. I know that I (as with many of my colleagues) have not thrown in the towel in this area.

But as with most attacks, I have learned that there is usually a nugget of truth within. We may be hurt by criticism, but we’re none the wiser if we do not listen carefully to the charge behind it. His personal frustrations had arisen because often the clergy have not met people’s needs as they might have. And if true, that is a message we desperately need to hear and heed. I concluded that the difference between that speaker and me is that I have not given up on the clergy just yet. Hence, this book.

The topics that I have chosen to explore are death; theodicy, a biblical account of mourning, memorialization as opportunity, the visit/eulogy, the hope of resurrection, suggested scriptural texts, difficult services, clergy/funeral director relations, and an extensive selection of practical hands-on aids (hymns, poems, quips, stories).

I have written sparsely regarding the topics of “grief and grief management.” In my estimation, those issues have been so extensively covered in volumes written by qualified professionals trained specifically in the counseling arena, that I refer the reader to those works. Also I have chosen not to include a chapter regarding the actual arranging or mechanics of a funeral service. The final orchestration of a service should be done by the Spirit of God and the minister, and to mechanize this effort seems a bit degrading to both the officiant and the Holy Spirit. Instead, what I have attempted to do is put a plethora of time-tested materials, tips, and aids into the hands of the minister.

Unapologetically, I have chosen not to be dogmatic in some of the areas of consideration treated in my book (for example, theodicy; burial vs. cremation). I have attempted to state the case well and give ample information regarding these somewhat mysterious

and potentially controversial issues. It is my conviction that conscientious ministers must decide for themselves where to leave these topics.

Quotations in this manuscript represent my selection of the illustrations which best express my intent and content. Wherever possible, permission has been obtained to use them in this publication. If there has been any oversight regarding use infringement, I apologize to those offended and will make every effort to rectify the situation. To borrow the old maxim, “To steal from one person is plagiarism, to steal from many is research.”

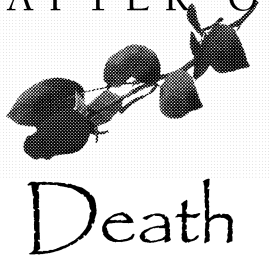
And so, we agree with King Solomon, “Of the making of books there is no end!”

My single intent is that the addition of this one to that endless collection will prove invaluable to all who minister in the difficult and tender task of death, dying, and the funeral/memorialization process.

God’s blessing upon us all as we labor in His field.

James D. Saxman

CHAPTER ONE



Death

The Wisdom of Qoheleth

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice . . . furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

—Ecclesiastes 9:2–3

Everyone dies.

Along with the book of Job, Ecclesiastes reminds us that God is bigger and that our lives are more unpredictable than we might think. The problem with Ecclesiastes is that for those of us who require tidy answers to complex issues, this book leaves us a bit perplexed. The qoheleth, or teacher, represented the wise men of his day. These wise men studied closely the interworkings of creation (nature) and human experience. From their wisdom they made pronouncements regarding some of life's most perplexing issues. The qoheleth's message seems particularly aimed at the individual who would seek to find life's meaning outside of faith in God. Twenty-nine times the author uses the phrase "life under the sun" to designate life outside of God's control and goodness. He addresses some of life's most sensitive questions. One of these is the question, "How can understanding death bring meaning to life?"

Bill and Teresa Syrios, in their helpful study on Ecclesiastes, begin with a poignant illustration regarding the value that death has in bringing meaning to life.

A historical cemetery, which sits on the edge of the University of Oregon campus, has for years been eyed by the university officials as a highly desirable slice of real estate. Students think it is an inconvenient obstacle as they crisscross the campus. Someone once had even suggested they build a superstructure of above-ground buildings over the plots beneath. Mr. And Mrs. Syrios then suggest that all these objections notwithstanding, a cemetery within the view of college students is perhaps the best reminder for young people to seek to fashion their lives around lifelong values, since contemplation of death gives man the wisdom to live well. Would that there were more cemeteries to make us think.¹

I read somewhere that John Wesley, the great circuit rider qoheleth (preacher, speaker, philosopher, teacher) of his day, was asked, “Mr. Wesley, if you knew that you were going to die tomorrow, what changes would you make for today?” His reply was, “I would do nothing different.” Apparently his life was so caught up with the things of Christ that he did not feel the need to alter the events of his day. But I suppose most of us could not answer with the great Methodist. The fact is, the knowledge of the urgency of the inevitability of our deaths would likely make most of us restructure our days and lives in a radical way. This is one of the values of the knowledge of death.

Death then, is the great equalizer; it is the “common destiny” which awaits us all. Derek Kidner states, “Everything is vanity (empty) . . . moral or immoral, religious or profane, we are all mown down alike. In a hundred years, as we say, it will all come to the same thing. Yet death seems to say this—it has a way of getting the last word.”² Dr. Walter Kaiser offers this thought: “Now Solomon does not level a charge against God when he labels what happens to good and evil men alike as an “evil” (9:3). His use of the term “evil,” like his evaluation, is strictly from the human point of view and based on appearances. He has, for the moment, purposely left out all considerations of the divine perspective and revelational facts. Thus, so far as men can see, one “event,” or “destiny,” comes to all.”³

Qoheleth tells us that there is one fate that awaits all. Righteous and wicked alike, all die. Jesus, in a similar way, explains that throughout life there will be evidence of God’s common dealings with all men (Matthew 5:45). These reminders are to serve as wake-

up calls on how to live in light of life's final event. Wise and foolish, righteous and wicked, clean and unclean, all will share this common experience. All die.

And so, what we discover is that qoheleth reminds us that a proper perspective on death will affect our priorities and values in life. If life is short, and death is an imminent absolute, then man must make certain that he has prioritized correctly. Redeem the life.

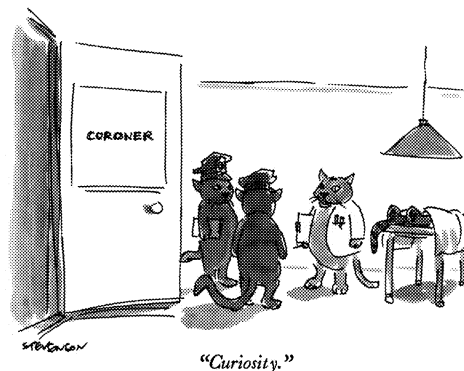
Jesus says, "Do not lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal." In light of death, we learn that we must focus on things that have eternal value, such as service to God and service to our fellow man. Jesus said, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

Finally, while death is arguably the greatest "known," at once it is still the greatest "unknown." We not only feel uneasy facing death, but just discussing death is a subject we avoid most of our days. And what is the reason for this discomfort? Most certainly it is because though death is thought of as a most "natural" part of the process of the life cycle, in fact the Bible tells us that it is not natural at all. Unlike Eastern cyclical philosophies, God's Word tells us that man was not originally created to die, but to live forever in perfect harmony with his God. Death, the result of sin, has come in as an unwanted alien, an intruder; and God's Word, our experience, and conscience all bear witness to this fact. It has taken us captive.

What then can man do to be set free from this life-long slavery, this fear of death (Hebrews 2:15)? God's answer: "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also, in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21–22). This then is God's liberating message for mankind. To know the meaning of death is to know the meaning of life—eternal!

DEATH

Truly, there is no shortage of quotations surrounding the topic of death. The following is a collection of quotes from individuals whose diverse minds have influenced our times.



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English and European Writers/Poets

Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us—they watch from their graves!

I was ever a fighter, so-one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and for bore,
And bade me creep past.
No! Let me taste the whole of it,
Fare like my peers the heroes of old,
Bare the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears.

—Robert Browning

Half our days we pass in the shadow of the earth;
and the brother of death exacts a third part of our lives.

Sleep is a death, O make me try,
By sleeping what it is to die.
And as gently lay my head
On my grave, as now my bed.

—Sir Thomas Browne

Straightway I was aware,
So weeping, how a mystic shape did move
And a voice said in mastery while I strove, . . .
“Guess now who holds thee?”—“Death”, I said, but there
The silver answer rang . . . “Not Death, but Love.”

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

And when a beast is dead he has no pain;
But man after his death must weep and complain.

—Geoffrey Chaucer

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

—William Wordsworth

What I like about Clive
Is that he is no longer alive.
There is a great deal to be said
For being dead.

—Edmund Clerihew Bentley

Since every man who lives is born to die,
And none can boast sincere felicity,
With equal mind, what happens, let us bear,
Nor joy nor grieve too much for things beyond our care.
Like pilgrims to the appointed place we tend;
The world's an inn and death the journey's end.

—John Dryden

O death the poor man's dearest friend, the kindest and the best!

—Robert Burns

Is life a boon? If so, it must befall
That death, whene'er he call, must call too soon.

—Sir William Schwenck Gilbert

Death is still working like a mole,
And digs my grave at each remove.

—George Herbert

He lives, he wakes, 'Tis Death is dead, not he.

Death is the veil which those who live call life:
They sleep, and it is lifted.

How wonderful is death, death and his brother sleep.

I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear,
Til death like sleep might steal on me.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas,
Ease after war, death after life does greatly please

Death is the end of woes: die soon, O fairy's son.

—Edmund Spenser
The Faerie Queene

Life is the desert, life the solitude;
Death joins us to the great majority.

—Edward Young

Death is parting, 'Tis the last sad adieu 'twixt soul and body.

—Nicholas Rowe

For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can hear the dead march play
And the regiment's in 'ollow square, they're hangin' him today;
They've taken of his buttons off and cut his stripes away,
And they're hangin' Danny Deever in the morning.

Yes, lad, I lie easy, I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart, never ask me whose.

—A.E. Housman

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.

—Laurence Binyon

Take hold of the wings of the morning,
And flop round the earth til you're dead;
But you won't get away from the tune they play
To the bloomin' old rag overhead.

—Rudyard Kipling

And he that will his health deny,
Down among the dead men let him lie.

—John Dyer

Dead! And . . . never called me mother.

—Mrs. Henry Wood

That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! More horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

O me, why have they not buried me deep enough?
Is it kind to have made me a grave so rough,
Me, that was never a quiet sleeper?
Bury me, bury me . . . deeper, ever so deeper.

It seemed so hard at first mother, to leave the blessed sun
And now it seems as hard to stay, and yet His will be done!
But still I think it can't be long before I find release;
And that good man, the clergyman, has told me words of peace.

Authority forgets a dying king.

Come not when I am dead,
To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave,
To trample round my fallen head,
And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save.

I held it truth, with him who sings, to one clear harp in divers tones
That men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to
higher things.

God's finger touched him and he slept.

No life that breathes with human breath has ever truly longed for death.

Sweet is true love though given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Death is the first breath which our souls draw when we enter life.

—Edwin Arnold

Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long piece there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but death.

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich dead
There none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

—Rupert Brooke

And come he slow, or come he fast,
It is but death who comes at last.

His morning walk was beneath the elms in the churchyard;
“for death,” he said, “had been his next door neighbor for so
many years, that he had no apology for dropping the acquaintance.”

—Sir Walter Scott, *Legend of Montrose*

Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for, thou
art not so, for those, whom thou thinkest, thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death.
One short sleep is past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more; death,
thou shalt die.

Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind:
Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: It tolls for thee.

Die not, poor death.

I shall not live 'till I see God; and when I have seen Him, I shall never die.

And what is so intricate, so entangling as death?
Who ever got out of a winding sheet.

O strong and long-lived death, how camest thou in?

I have a sin or fear that when I have spun my last thread, I shall perish on the shore; Swear by thyself that at my death, thy sun shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore; and having done that, thou hast done, I have no more.

—John Donne

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe, with loss of Eden.

—John Milton

By turns we catch the fatal breath and die.

Tell me, my soul, can this be death?

—Alexander Pope

When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.
Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

The weariest and most loathed worldly life that age, ache,
penury, and imprisonment can lay on nature . . .
is a paradise to what we fear of death.

The worst is death, and death will have his day.

He that cuts off twenty years of life, cuts off so many years of fearing death.

The miserable have no other medicine but only hope:
I have hope to live, and am prepared to die.

Come away, come away, death, and in sad cypress let me be laid; fly away, fly away, breath: I am slain by a fair cruel maid. My shroud of white, stuck all with yew, o prepare it. My part of death no one so true did share it. Not a flower, not a flower sweet, on my black coffin let there be strewn; Not a friend, not a friend greet my poor course, where my bones shall be thrown. A thousand thousand sighs to save, lay me o where sad true lover never find my grave, to weep there.

Be still prepared for death
And death or life shall thereby be the sweeter.

Golden lads and girls all must, as chimney-sweepers come to dust.

Look, here is the warrant, Claudio, for thy death:
'Tis now dead midnight, and by eight tomorrow thou
must be made immortal. A man that apprehends death
no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep.

O death, a scent too faint for mortals to detect.

How oft when men are at the point of death have they been merry!
Which their keepers call a lightning before death.

This fell sergeant, death, is strict in his arrest.

—William Shakespeare

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains.
What's death? You'll love me yet.

A man can have but one life and one death, one heaven one hell.

—Robert Browning

Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
And stars to set—but all,
Thou has all seasons for thine own, o death!

—Felicia Dorothea Hemans

Life is a coquetry of death, which wearies me, too sure of the amour.

—Francis Thompson
To the dead Cardinal of Westminster

Dear, beauteous death! The jewel of the just, shining nowhere but in the dark;
what mysteries do lie beyond thy dust could man outlook that mark!

—Henry Vaughan

Underneath this sable hearse
Lies the subject of all verse,
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother;
Death! Ere thou hast slain another,
Fair and learned, and good as she,
Time shall throw a dart at thee.

—William Browne
Epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke

He did not wear his scarlet coat,
For blood and wine are red,
And blood and wine were on his hands
When they found him with the dead.

One can survive nowadays except death.

The Governor was strong upon the regulations act:
The doctor said that Death was but a scientific fact:
And twice a day the Chaplain called, and left a little tract.

—Oscar Wilde

Eat thou and drink; tomorrow thou shalt die.
They die not, for their life was death, but cease;
and round their narrow lips the mould falls close.
Think thou and act; tomorrow thou shalt die.

—Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight,
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

—William Butler Yeats
An Irish Airman foresees his death

Wild animals never kill for sport. Man is
the only one to whom the torture and death
of his fellow creatures is amusing in itself.

—James Anthony Froude

Faith of our Fathers, holy faith.
We will be true to thee til death

—Frederick William Faber

It irked him to be here, he could not rest.
He went; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead!

Strew on her roses, roses, and never a spray of yew.
In quiet she reposes: Ah! Would that I did too.
Her cabined ample spirit, it fluttered and failed for breath.
Tonight it doth inherit the vasty hall of death.

—Matthew Arnold

When death to either shall come,
I pray it be first to me, be happy as ever at home,
If so, as I wish, it be.

If thou canst death defy, if thy faith is entire,
Press onward, for thine eye shall see thy heart's desire.

—Robert Bridges

I am sure my bones would not rest in an English grave,
or my clay mix with the earth of that country. I believe the
thought would drive me mad on my death bed, could I suppose
that any of my friends would be base enough to convey my
carcass back to your soil.

—Lord Byron

O sing unto me roundelaie,
O drop the brynie tear with me,
Dance no more at hallie daie,
Like a reynynge river be;
My love is dead
Gone to his deathbed
All under the willow tree.

Minstrel song
—Thomas Chatterton

Can storied earn, or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can honor's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or flattery soothe the dull, cold ear of death?
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

—Thomas Gray

Dying is a very dull, dreary affair. My advice to you is to have nothing whatever to do with it.

—Somerset Maugham

To live in the hearts we leave behind, is not to die.

—Thomas Campbell

A man's dying is more the survivor's affair than his own.

—Thomas Mann

Death is not a journeying into an unknown land; it is a voyage home. We are going not to a strange country, but to our Father's house, and among our kith and kin.

—John Ruskin

Death is not death if it raises us in a moment from darkness into light, from weakness into strength, from sinfulness into holiness.

—Charles Kingsley

Death's but a path that must be trod,
If man would ever pass to God.

—Thomas Parnell

The crooked paths look straighter as we approach the end.

Each departed friend is a magnet that attracts us to the next world.

—Johann Paul Friedrich Richter

There are, aren't there, only three things we can do about death: to desire it, to fear it, or to ignore it.

He who does not fear death has no fear of threats.

—Pierre Corneille

I acquiesce in my death with complete willingness,
uncolored by hesitation; how foolish to cling to life when
God has ordained otherwise!

—Jorge Manrique

I am afraid of dying—but being dead, oh yes,
that to me is often an appealing prospect.

—Kathe Schmidt Kollwitz

I am ready at any time. Do not keep me waiting.

—John Brown

I look upon life as a gift from God. I did nothing to earn it.
Now that the time is coming to give it back, I have no right to complain.

—Joyce Cary

Let me die. As the leaves die, gladly.

—D.C Claussen

The fear of death is worse than death.

—Robert Burton

The rich, the poor, the great, the small
are leveled. Death confounds 'em all.

—John Gay

When death, the great reconciler, has come, it is never
our tenderness that we regret, but our severity.

—George Eliot

I shall be like a tree, I shall die at the top.

—Jonathon Swift

How little room do we take up in death, that, living,
know no bounds?

—James Shirley

It is better to be a fool than to be dead.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

When I go down to the grave I can say, like so many others,
I have finished my work; but I cannot say I have finished my life.
My days work will begin the next morning. My tomb is not a blind
alley. It is a thoroughfare. It closes in the twilight to open in the dawn.

—Victor Hugo

American Writers/Poets

A child said, “What is the grass?” fetching it to one with full hands;
Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner’s name someway in the corners,
That we may see and remark, and say “Whose?”
And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Come lovely and soothing death, undulate round the world,
serenely arriving, arriving, in the day, in the night, to all, to each,
sooner or later, delicate death.

Joy, shipmate, joy! (Pleased to my soul at death I cry,
our life is closed, our life begins, the long anchorage we leave,
the ship is clear at last, she leaps! She swiftly courses from
the shore, Joy, shipmate, joy!

—Walt Whitman

He did not feel the drive of the whip; Nor the burning heat of day;
For Death had illumined the land of sleep,
And his lifeless body lay
A worn out fetter, that the soul
Had broken and thrown away.

There is a reaper whose name is Death,
And, with his sickle keen,
He reaps thee bearded grain at a breath,
And the flowers that grow between.

Emigravit is the inscription on the tombstone where he lies;
Dead he is not, but departed, for the artist never dies.

There is no death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath is but a suburb of the life elysian,
whose portal we call death.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The report of my death was an exaggeration.

Why is it that we rejoice at a birth and grieve at a funeral?
It is because we are not the person involved.

Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.

—Mark Twain

Anyone not coming to be a dead one before coming to be an old one
comes to be an old one and comes then to be a dead one as any old one
comes to be a dead one.

—Gertrude Stein

Death is the great adventure beside which moon
landings and space trips pale into insignificance.

—Joseph Bayly

I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens.

—Woody Allen

Don't call this dying; I am just entering upon life.

—Henry James Sr.

If you treat your friend shabbily while he lives, you have no right to try to even up matters by whining over him when he is dead.

—Joseph Berry

One consolation of death is that it is also the end of your taxes.

—Daniel Webster

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps thee drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

—Thanatopsis, William Cullen Bryant

There is no death. Only a change of worlds.

—Chief Seattle

The death of a child is an assault on our sense of future.

—Allan Wolfelt

If you submit to God's will, everything, including the time of your death, is under God's supervision.

At death we cross from one territory to another, but we'll have no trouble with visas. Our representative is already there, preparing for our arrival. As citizens of heaven, our entrance is incontestable.

—Erwin W. Lutzer

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.
Trust no future, however pleasant!
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Act, act in the living present!
Heart within, and God overhead.

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.
Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

He is dead, the sweet musician
He the sweetest of all singers
He has gone from us forever,
He has moved a little nearer
To the Master of all music,
To the Master of all singing!
Oh my brother, Chibiabos!

Hiawatha's Lament
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Death is not the greatest loss in life.
The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.

—Norman Cousins

There is one thing that keeps surprising you about
stormy old friends after they die—their silence.

—Ben Hecht

We are but tenants, and . . . shortly the great Landlord
will give us notice that our lease has expired.

—Joseph Jefferson

There is a strange beauty in Death's singular reliability as a
keeper of secrets, in the perfection of his cowled silence.

—Dean Koontz

Because I could not stop for death he kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves and immortality.

—Emily Dickinson

Hymn Writers/Clergy/Religion

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

And thou, most kind and gentle death, waiting to hush our latest breath;
O Praise Him—Alleluia! Thou leadest home the child of God
And Christ our Lord the way hath trod.

—St. Francis of Assisi

Life is a great surprise. I do not see
why death should be an even greater one.

—Vladimir Nabokov

Death has an amazing power of altering what a man
desires because death profoundly affects his outlook.

—Oswald Chambers

It is only my body; all is right in my soul.

—Samuel Hopkins

Lord, grant that my last hour may be my best hour.

—Old English prayer

Lord, look out for me when I die. Make it a good
experience.

—St. Francis de Sales

Death is God's delightful way of giving us life.

Death has got something to be said for it;
There's no need to get out of bed for it;
Wherever you may be, they bring it to you free.

—Kingsley Amis

Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er;
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore.

Death, like a narrow sea, divides
That heavenly land from ours.

—Isaac Watts

Death must be distinguished from dying,
with which it is often confused.

—Rev. Sidney Smith

God's eternity and man's mortality join to
persuade us that faith in Jesus Christ is not optional.

—A.W. Tozer

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

—Henry Frances Light, hymn writer