

**WHEN THIS LIFE
ENDS
A NEW LIFE BEGINS**

R. L. Wright, Ph.D.

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Preface

What makes a person write a book on death and dying? At what point does he or she become so knowledgeable of such a macabre topic? How much experience does it take to be proficient enough to tap into the soul of a grieving parent or a sibling that has lost a brother or sister to addiction and bring them comfort?

I am no stranger to the effects of drugs and alcohol on its victims, family and friends. It has been a part of my life for the past forty-five years and will continue to be a part of my life for the duration of my time here on earth. Through my experiences while working in undercover narcotics, I saw the horrors of addiction firsthand. You would not believe some of the things I have witnessed. The crimes committed by the addict who craved heroin would be so horrifying that some would steal from the ones they loved or kill the innocent bystander for just a few dollars to get their next \$10.00 “fix.” Then you have the cruel psychological and emotional pain the drug dealers would inflict on the addicts that owed them money.

After my car partner was shot and killed by a young man who was high on drugs, I hated that kid. I hated the drugs. I hated the dealers and I hated the users. I vowed to arrest as many of them as I could get my hands on. Hate is a mighty powerful word.

I have two sons that were practically raised in the church. They were taught right from wrong and they are good boys. So, you can imagine my shock and disbelief the day my oldest son Josh said to me, “Dad, I have a heroin problem.”

In a million years I would have never thought my son would become what I hated most in life. He became a heroin user and a drug dealer. Oh, I could have gone on hating but I had a decision to make. Hate my son or change my ways. I decided to change my ways.

Added to my experience in law enforcement comes my years of experience as a minister. I have been the Pastor at Merritt Park Baptist Church in Dundalk, Maryland for the past forty-two years. In addition, I have also been teaching drug and alcohol education classes for the State of Maryland through the Alpha Program for forty-two years. I saw firsthand how Treatment Programs would turn an addict away from the much-needed treatment because they had no money or insurance to pay for treatment. I would like to see the people who run these programs held accountable for playing God with the people we love.

Writing this book has brought back a lot of old memories and opened a flood of emotions. From sadness to laughter; and from laughter to becoming very upset with the politicians who did nothing. There were times I laughed remembering the personalities of so many of these young men and women. Then my thoughts went to the parents. Witnessing the pain and the sadness of what it's like to lose a child. The memory of losing my car partner who was shot and killed by a young man addicted to drugs. The memory of losing my nephew, who was only seventeen at the time of his death, and the pain his parents and siblings went through, and are still going through to this day. And the memory of one hundred and eighteen students I have buried over the years and the countless others that were not my students. There were many times when I had to walk away from writing for a while because the memories and

emotions were just too overwhelming. About 75% of all funeral services I have performed were drug or alcohol related. I estimate the total number of funerals I performed for addicted families to be close to, if not more than, a thousand in a forty-five-year period of time.

Do all of the records, documents, letters and degrees qualify me to write this book? The answer is “Yes” and “No.” But what does qualify me to write this book is one word, “LOVE.” I had to learn to love something I hated. I had to stop hating my son for what he was and start loving him for who he was. Drugs and alcohol make people do things they normally would not do without its poisonous venom seeping through their veins. It causes pain and heartache for everyone it touches. And it touches everyone. Yes, this book was incredibly painful to write. Yes, this book may prove to be incredibly painful to read. But, I hope to provide you with understanding and peace.

INTRODUCTION

We have all experienced the loss of a loved one and the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual toll it takes on us. If you're thinking, "No, I have not really experienced that before," in time, you most certainly will. So, this book may be especially important for you. Every second people die from all kinds of things like: car accidents, heart attacks, domestic violence, acts of terrorism, suicide, and oh, so many deaths from drug and alcohol abuse.

If you are struggling with the pain and heartache of losing a loved one to drugs or alcohol; if you or someone you know is struggling with an addiction problem; or if you are looking for a self-help book on death and dying, this may be the book you are seeking. Please understand that some will not agree with my views, however; by doing my own research and interviewing many addicted people over many years, I will relay to you my thoughts and opinions only to try and give you peace, comfort and understanding.

This book has several purposes. My hope is that when you are finished reading the book you will see the addict in a different light. Not as addicts, but as good people who are just like everyone else on this earth with one exception. And that is they made a bad decision that led them down the path to unfortunate consequences. Try not to pass judgment upon them. It is a self-help book; a spiritual journey to find peace for the Christian and understanding for the non-Christian. And most importantly, it is to help you find ways to remember your loved ones.

I will do my best to assist you in finding the peace that has left you the moment you received the news of your loved one's passing. I will do my best to help answer some of the questions you may have. Some will be spiritual questions and others will be more personal in nature. Questions like, "Why haven't the police investigated my son's death?" "When will this pain go away?" "Where is my loved one? Is he/she in Heaven?"

I will introduce you to parents who have lost their children. And I will walk you through the journey of what the addicted person is facing as the addiction progresses.

Maybe it will help you save the life of someone else. My hope is that you will honor your sons or daughters by getting involved. Open your hearts to the families and friends of the addicted community. Please visit my website at: www.marylandduiclasses.com, and read the section on treatment and the section on our Memorial Garden. You can find ways to turn your sorrow into a community project.

If you are a Christian, this unbearable pain is a season that you are going through. The day will come when you will find peace, but your journey will be long. Welcome to the book that will dig deep into your past. I would like to first address the day of your conversion. Do you remember someone telling you about this scripture?

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16, (underlining added for emphasis).

I have underlined the word “whosoever.” That word means anyone. From the everyday mom and dad to the sons and daughters they bring into the world. And to the friends they meet in their journey of life; no matter who they are or where they come from. They are the “whosoever” I am talking about. If you are reading this book you no doubt lost a very special person in your life. If that person was a son or daughter and the loss was because of drugs or alcohol remember the word “whosoever.”

You must understand Christians are not exempt from death. Reach out to God right now. It’s okay to tell God how you feel or how faithful you have been. Maybe you remember Martha, a good friend to Jesus. Read what she said to him about her brother’s death. “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21, NIV). Martha felt just what you’re feeling. But if you believe in the word of God you will find comfort in this next scripture: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18, NIV).

Remember the word “whosoever.” Your loved one was one of the “whosoever” the Bible speaks about. Oh, there is one other thing to remember ... your pain and sorrow is the same that a non-Christian feels. The only difference is that you have Christ to lean on. Please read Psalm 34:18 again.

If you are not a Christian, don’t worry, I am not going to preach a sermon to you; well, not directly anyway. You have this book to help you understand and unravel the horrific loss of someone you loved. The only difference

between you and the Christian parent is that they have found Christ in their life. However, the pain of death is the same for us all. You and I are both one of the “whosoever.” None of us, Christian or non-Christian, have any guarantees in life, except that we will one day die. My hope is that you will find the answers you are desperately seeking. Take the time to skim over the table of contents and look for the topics you wish to read.

If you are not a Christian and would like to learn more about accepting Christ please go to the section in the book entitled “Salvation.” If you happen to find salvation through Jesus Christ in your journey of seeking peace, then Glory to God!

I would suggest you have a box of tissues handy when you read this book, only because there will be no escaping the pain and suffering people go through when they lose a loved one. I suggest you read the sections that apply to you. Not everyone has lost a child to addiction. Some may have lost a child to an illness or an accident. Or maybe your loss came from a self-inflicting act. I hope that this book will speak to you. I hope it will address your struggles, provide ways for you to cope, and teach you how to learn to love a person but hate the things they do.

I hope this book will be a comfort to you in the coming years. I remember a lady who called me years ago. She said she does two things before going to bed at night. First, she reads her Bible and then she reads parts of my first book, We Never Said Good Bye. She said that book was a great help to her. Much of the content from that book is contained in this one as well.

If you have any questions, please refer to the contact information found in the back of this book. I would love to hear from you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Katherine Thomas for all of her time and attention that she put into this project. She kept me focused and was indeed a great inspiration for me in writing this book.

I would like to thank the parents and other family members who contributed to this book. Your stories will help others in their painful journey.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all parents who have endured the pain and heartache of losing a child.

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

If you have not read the Preface located in the front of the book please do so. I will be using the word, “whosoever” throughout the book as a reminder that anyone can change their life. No matter what direction you are now headed in you can change. Even though you may have lost a loved one and you’re feeling sad and depressed, in time, you can get through the pain and possibly help prevent someone else from suffering the same way you are. As you read this section of the book you will be very surprised to find out the truth about addiction. In fact, parts of this book will reopen some of your wounds of the past. The following are my opinions based on real stories and research over a forty-five year period. Not all cases are the same. The outcome can be different based on other factors. I hope this section will help you understand that your loving son or daughter was lost to a powerful drug. You could be the best parents in the entire world but addiction will rob you of all the things you hoped your child would become. The drug changed them and the drug took them from you.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Many people claim to have never personally experienced an addiction. When you hear the word addiction, what comes to your mind? Many people automatically associate the word addiction to drugs or alcohol. Therefore, it would be very hard for these people to understand or even acknowledge that they too may have an addiction. If you look around and just watch people you may find your introduction to the world of addiction.

Let's start with a little test. What happens when you wake up in the morning and find that you are out of coffee? Let's say you smoke cigarettes. What happens if you run out? For some, their world is filled with frustration until they have their "daily fix." Their actions and behavior tell everyone around them that they need their cups of java or cigarettes to start off their day. They may be moody and snap at people or they may feel tired and grumpy. These people may have an addiction to caffeine or nicotine. What about the person you see outside running every single day; regardless of the weather conditions? They run in the pouring down rain, snow and even 100 degree weather. He or she may be addicted to running. What about the person who works every day of the week, not out of necessity, but just because they seem to love it? They may be a workaholic. The same for a person that craves sex all of the time or a person that must watch a certain TV show or follow a certain routine every day. What about food? Or gambling? Or maybe shopping? Addicted people are all around us. Could you be an addict?

Some addictions are considered acceptable in our society while others are not. Is one addiction worse than another? I have found that people will typically answer yes to that question. Many look at drug addicts and quickly pass judgment on them thinking how awful of a person they must be. I mean, what kind of person would use drugs anyway? Yes, their decision to use drugs can cause them to lose everything they have; family, friends, jobs, money. Yes, the drugs can turn them into people we don't even recognize. The person we once knew is lost. And yes, it is a fact that drugs and alcohol can alter a person's mood and behavior turning their actions into abuse. They abuse themselves and can cause harm to those around them. Verbal abuse and sometimes physical abuse are both products of addiction. Yes, drug and alcohol addiction causes a tremendous amount of pain for everyone in its deadly path.

Many other addictions also have potentially negative consequences for the addicted person as well as for those around them. Take for example the person who may be addicted to sex. It can occupy the majority of the person's thoughts, taking up a tremendous amount of their time. It can alter their behavior and their mood, leading them to neglect their responsibilities to their families and/or job. Many times, if the addict is married, this addiction can lead to adultery. Verbal and physical abuse is common. Financial issues, including bankruptcy, are common. This addiction, like drug or alcohol addiction, also negatively affects the person, their spouse, their family and the families of those impacted by the behavior. Just ask the spouses or children of these addicts and they will tell you

that the addicted person's behavior caused a tremendous amount of pain.

So don't be so quick to pass judgment on the drug or alcohol addicted person. We typically do not understand something until we ourselves experience it. The reality is that we are all just one bad decision away from destroying our lives and the lives of those around us.

THE DRUG ADDICTION EPIDEMIC

There are five categories of drugs: Stimulants, Depressants, Hallucinogens, Cannabis and Narcotics (opioids). Each drug is different; having its own personality. Each drug will also change the normal functions of the brain. The use of any of these drugs could cause behavior problems, impaired judgment, shifts in emotions and memory and learning problems.

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an estimated 20 million Americans aged 12 or older used an illegal drug in the past 30 days. Illicit drugs include marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or prescription drugs used without a prescription. And, despite the numbers, for many people, the facts about drugs are not understood.

The best way to understand just how bad the drug problem really is would be to bring back the memory and tragedy of 9/11 where thousands of innocent lives were lost. Also tragic is that we lose about 100 people a day in the U.S. due to drug overdoses. That is like having a 9/11 every three weeks in the USA! And that figure does not even include

the lives of the people lost due to the crimes that addicts commit.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that drug use costs the U.S. more than \$700 billion due to increased health care costs, crime and lost productivity. Other effects on society include:

- The spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C (either through sharing needles or unprotected sex)
- Deaths due to overdose or other complications from drug use
- Effects on unborn children of pregnant women who use drugs
- Crime, unemployment, domestic abuse, family dissolution and homelessness

Let's dig a little deeper into the questions, "Why do people use drugs?" and "What kind of person would use drugs anyway?"

Did you know that many senior adults have an addiction to drugs? And did you know most of the opioid addiction problems today come after injuries or surgery? In my opinion, we have too many doctors writing too many prescriptions. Call me old school but when I was a kid you never heard of people having as many problems as they have today. We never wanted to go to a doctor and we rarely heard of addiction like we do nowadays. But times have changed, and we live in a world of "take a pill" and if that doesn't work, "take another one." People figure if a drug is prescribed by a doctor, then it must be okay. Taken

as prescribed would be okay but here is the problem. Doctors are prescribing pills for a month, sometimes three months, at a time. This presents the opportunity to take more than the prescribed amount in order to feel better. The result is that it could lead to an addiction. And sadly, sometimes the prescription medication reaches the hands of children without the person it was prescribed to even noticing. So people unintentionally get hooked on prescription drugs. And if that is not bad enough, some people are turning to heroin because it's cheaper and easier to get after the recent government crackdowns on prescription drug abuse. Perhaps counseling without medication should be considered.

Although many things in life are now made easier through advancement in technology, the stresses of life seem to have increased. In fact, stress is the number one reason that people go to the doctors and emergency rooms. In addition to stress, people are suffering from a number of health issues. Three of the main health problems of today are anxiety, bipolar disorder and depression. Some people seek drugs or alcohol to help relieve their symptoms and help them to feel normal again.

For some people, drug use can be used as a way to escape a boring life and enter into an altered reality. Peer pressure is another big factor. And still others may begin to use drugs out of curiosity. Others resort to using drugs and alcohol to cover painful memories from their past like: bullying, bad marriages, a death of a loved one, loss of jobs and sexual abuse, just to name a few. Some people may seek drugs or alcohol to relieve their pain. If they only knew the incredible pain and consequences it brings instead; maybe

they would think twice before using. Consequences like losing friends and family; financial issues; trust issues; homelessness; committing crimes and facing jail time; or the ultimate consequence which is death. And what about the truly innocent who are suffering the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse? Research shows no end in sight for babies being born dependent on drugs due to a national epidemic of pain medication and heroin. An article featured in USA Today, entitled Born into suffering: More babies arrive dependent on drugs, by Laura Ungar, describes how these infants are suffering. “Infants such as Leopoldo cry piercingly and often. They suffer vomiting, diarrhea, feeding difficulties, low-grade fevers, seizures and even respiratory distress if they’re born prematurely. They’re extra-sensitive to noise and light, so NICUs must be kept dark and quiet. Treatment includes declining doses of morphine and comfort measures like swaddling and rocking to calm them.” These innocent babies are addicts. Are we to judge them?

Opioid use in the U.S. is at a crisis. The problem that no one seems to want to address has now become an epidemic. And then there is the problem of the stigma associated with those who have a drug or alcohol addiction or those who are recovering addicts. This stigma needs to go away. These people are not bad people. Their actions towards others can be bad but they made a bad choice. Like the innocent babies who are born into addiction, they need treatment, not judgment.

So back to the question, “What kind of person would use drugs anyway?” Those people are our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, friends and

neighbors and don't forget me and you. And until we, as a nation, open our eyes, speak up and demand treatment for these people, it will continue to affect everyone ... the addict, their families, our communities, our nation.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIFE OF AN ADDICT

We will never forget the day our children were brought into this world. And sadly, for some of you, you will never forget how your child left this world. If you are reading this, most likely you, or someone you know, are suffering because a loved one was lost due to drugs or alcohol. Science does demonstrate that human life begins at conception. To avoid all the controversy about this topic, I will agree with science on that one. I think we will all agree that human life as we know it here on earth ends when the physical body dies. But is that the end of life? I will get to that question a little later.

For just a moment let's go back to the happy years. What a joyous occasion when your child came into the world. Such enrichment a child can bring to a person's life. Learning how to walk and to talk; watching them play and make friends. Their very first day of school, which I'm sure was harder on you than on them. We watched them grow from infants to toddlers to young adults. Maybe your child was on the honor roll in school or maybe he or she struggled with their education. They may have played sports, played in the school band or acted in school plays. Maybe he or

she was even elected by their peers to become the most likely to succeed in life. As our children grow we have great expectations for them. Attend college; land a good job; get married; have children of their own; experience everlasting happiness. Life is good and they are good kids, never really getting into any major trouble. But then something happened.

You may not have even noticed the change in your child, but I can assure you that many of your family members and friends saw the change. Maybe they said something and maybe they didn't. Maybe you saw it and rationalized the change in your child's behavior so it went unaddressed. You may have thought things like, "Not my child!" "He is just going through a 'phase'." "She will grow out of it." But then reality sets in and you think, "How could my child have become an addict?"

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF ADDICTION

Many people may not immediately recognize the signs of drug or alcohol use. Not every person will experience every sign. The signs can vary depending upon the person and the drug that is being used. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, some of the common signs are:

- Impaired speech and motor coordination
- Bloodshot eyes or pupils that are larger or smaller than usual
- Changes in physical appearance or personal hygiene
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain

- Unusual smells on breath, body or clothing
- Changes in mood or disinterest in engaging in relationships or activities

If a person is compulsively seeking and using a drug despite negative consequences, such as, a loss of a job, increasing debt, family problems or physical and mental problems brought on by drug use, it's a good chance that he or she is probably addicted. And while the addict believes they can stop at any time, most often they cannot and need professional help.

Please keep in mind that a person can have some of these symptoms without having a drug or alcohol problem. They could be suffering from another health issue. So, I implore you, parents, please do your own research and immediately address any changes in behavior that are not normal for your child.

What hurts me the most dealing with these kids (age is not a factor when you're 73) is that the drugs will take everything that they have. They will never have what other parents' kids will have. They have lost their self-esteem, their health, their home, and sadly, for some, their life.

WHY DO ADDICTS LIE?

I am sure you have been told some real whoppers dealing with the addiction of your loved one. Most of the time, I honestly don't think they know why they lie. They lie about things that make no sense to even lie about. I have found that addicts will lie even when the truth would be easier to

tell. If it sounds good to them then they want you to buy into it. Here's a true story of a lady that I will call Mary.

Mary and her husband were arrested for possession with the intent to sell drugs. Mary set up an appointment with me for a drug evaluation. The very first thing she says is, "Tell me if you believe this. My husband and I were riding down Eastern Avenue when we came to a red light at Caroline Street. We had the back window down and a man runs up to the car and throws this bag in the window. My husband says, "Let's get out of here." So we drive home and we looked in the bag and my husband says, "It's marijuana and it's a large amount. We need to put this into smaller bags and throw it away." I abruptly interrupted her and said, "Before you continue with this *simply amazing story*, did anyone tell you that I am retired from working undercover narcotics?" Mary received home arrest and her husband went to jail. It made no sense for Mary to lie. The outcome would have been much better for her if she simply told the truth.

I want to help give you a clear picture of why addicts lie. Let me try and tap into their mind for just a moment and maybe it will help you understand addictive behavior.

THE FIRST LIE?

Let's go back for a moment and talk about the very first lie. The one the addict tells himself or herself and that is, "I can quit whenever I want." Drugs or alcohol can temporarily make that person feel "normal" again and most people do

not believe they will ever become addicted. The problem is that they will need more and more of the drug for them to be able to experience that very first high again. When they stop experiencing that high, they may try a more potent drug that will temporarily do the trick. And so, the pattern begins. The addicts will tell you that after the first injection they start chasing the high. The highs are equally as powerful as the lows felt when coming off the drugs. When relapse occurs, the cycle starts all over and it is an extremely difficult cycle to break. All of the full-blown addicts will truly find themselves in a situation that they cannot reverse on their own.

THE SECOND LIE?

The second lie the addict tells is, “I am not hurting anyone.” If you’ve ever dealt with the consequences of addiction, you already know firsthand that that is a lie. In the section, “What is Addiction,” I spoke about the negative impact addiction can have not only on the addict, but also on those around them. Here is another sad but true story.

I was asked to speak to a group of kids about drug addiction. When I walked in, I honestly thought I was speaking to kids that were born with birth defects. Every child in the room had visible scars that if you were not careful you would begin to stare at them. One kid who was about nine years old had facial scars. His eye was sunken in and you could see where it had appeared he had undergone numerous operations. He also walked with a limp and had a pitiful expression on his face. This young man had a lot of questions;

questions that didn't seem to fit with the reason why I was there. For example, he wanted to know what I would do if someone killed my mother. I was taken aback by that question and didn't know what to say. I talked to the children for about 30 minutes. When I was finished, and the children were being dismissed, I asked one of the teachers what had happened to the children. He said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought they told you. These are kids that were abused by their parents who are addicted to drugs." The boy who asked me the question was beaten with the leg of a chair. He lost the sight in his eye and his hip was badly broken. As I left, that little boy just waved his little hand and I waved back because I was tearing up and could not speak.

Oh, I could tell stories all day about the horrors of addiction. It's important to understand that the drug changed them. Anything that interrupts the process of buying or using the drug will have no place in the addict's life. The addict will do whatever it takes to maintain their addiction. Addicts are very skilled at lying, stealing and scamming people. They cannot be trusted. I saw this pattern with my son and so many others over the past forty-five years. Here are some things to remember:

1. The first thing that is important to know is that lying is part of the addiction.
2. The addict will lie to avoid confrontation and questions. The addiction has started. The addict is in denial and doesn't want to face facts. In other words, they are not ready for treatment. He or she only wants to move on from the conversation. They are fine, they will say. They are just tired or have a lot on their mind, they will say. And as

the parent you may have taken it hook, line and sinker. Do you really think they wanted you to know that they have become an addict? It's too much for them to admit to, so they would rather live this double life. What they don't know is what lies ahead.

3. Does the addict lie to deliberately hurt the people around them? The answer is no. The addict has a way of blocking everyone and everything out of their lives. Why? Because they will do anything to reach the high that they are chasing. It's not that your son or daughter hated you or disrespected you.
4. Remember, the addict will do ANYTHING to feel that high. Out of desperation, they will break into vehicles and homes, they panhandle and in some cases resort to prostitution. Sometimes they will sell fake drugs to others to make money to support their own habit.
5. Do addicts feel shame? Do they care about how they look? At first, I honestly think they do care. However, the deeper they sink into the addiction the less they care about anyone or anything. Every now and then you may see a flicker of concern when they have a sober moment.
6. Sometimes, addicts lie because the stigma associated with being an addict or being a recovering addict, is just too much to deal with. The stigma associated with those who have a drug or alcohol addiction or those who are recovering addicts, needs to go away. I am in no way attempting to downplay their actions, but I do need you to understand that they were not always like this. These people are not bad people, but yes, sometimes their actions and behavior are bad.

You may find that your son or daughter is currently in this situation. Or sadly, you may have lost a child or family member due to drugs or alcohol. The poem that follows may help you understand what the addicted person is or was going through. Again, this is not an attempt to justify their behavior, it is for you to gain understanding about why they behave the way they do.

“MISS HEROIN”

Author Unknown

*So now little man you've grown tired of grass
All that damn acid, that cocaine and hash.
And someone pretending that he is your friend
Said "I'll introduce you to Miss Heroin".*

*Well honey before you start fooling with me
Just let me tell you of how it will be.
For I will seduce you and make you my slave
Believe me I've sent stronger men to their grave.
You think you could never become a disgrace
Then end up addicted to poppy seed waste.
You'll start by experimenting one afternoon
And end up asleep in my arms very soon.*

*Then once I have entered deep in your veins
The craving will drive you nearly insane.
You'll need lots of money as you have been told
For darling, I'm more expensive than gold.
You'll swindle your mother for just a buck*

*And turn into someone who's vile and corrupt.
You'll mug and you'll steal for the narcotic charms
Then feel so content when I'm in your arms.*

*Then you'll realize the monster inside you has grown
And you'll solemnly swear to leave me alone.
But if you think that it's easy and that you've got the knack
Then sweetie, just try getting me off your back.*

*The vomit, the cramps, your gut in a knot
The jangling nerves screaming for just one more shot.
The hot chills, the cold sweat, the withdrawal pains
Can only be saved by my little white grains.*

*So now you return (just as I foretold)
And I know that you'll give me your body and soul.
You'll give me your morals, your conscience, your heart
And now you are mine till death do us part.*

The person who wrote that poem knew how things would end. Whether someone becomes addicted to marijuana, OxyContin, heroin, Xanax, cocaine, methamphetamine or Vicodin, etc., the effect on the brain and on their life is the same... an uncontrollable craving to keep using that is more important than anything else in their life, including: family, friends, wife, husband, children, church or even God.

INNOCENCE LOST

Let me take a moment to tell you about some really good kids. Kids that were smart, outgoing and who once loved life. Unfortunately, they loved heroin more than anyone or anything else on this earth. These are real stories about good, young men and women who simply made bad choices in life.

Jimmy was a good kid but like most of the addicts, after he started using he was never the same. Jimmy would steal anything he could get his hands on. But on a fall evening in October, Jimmy made a fatal mistake. He broke into a bar and it wasn't his first time. But this particular night, the owner was waiting. As Jimmy went through the window holding a screwdriver, the owner shot and killed him. Jimmy was 20 years old.

Jerry, Little Jerry and Beth - a young couple with a son not only sold heroin but were users. Little Jerry was the first to die. The heroin he bought was laced with fentanyl and his parents were not at home to call for help. The death

of their son only created more problems. Beth would be the next to pass away because of a drug overdose. Then about five months later, Jerry Sr. was found dead of an overdose. Their entire family devastated.

Johnny One Shoe - Johnny got this name because he would run from the police every time they found him standing on the street corner. And every time he ran, he would lose one of his shoes. Johnny was found dead in an alleyway after he injected bad heroin. Johnny was 22.

Ellie was about 27 years old and had been on the streets most of her life. She was a prostitute and a heroin addict. One day a friend of Ellie's told me she was in the hospital and asked me if I would visit her. Ellie was in the AIDS unit at Johns Hopkins Hospital. I would visit Ellie weekly and as time passed we both looked forward to the visits. Ellie wanted so badly to see her father because she knew that she was very ill. Her father wanted nothing to do with her. He was very stern and refused to see her. I told Ellie that if she wanted me to, I would take a letter to her father. I remember her being so excited about that. The next day I visited Ellie, but she was not in her room. The nurse told me that Ellie had passed away. Ellie must have known her time was near, so she requested that the nurse give me a letter. The envelope simply read, "To Dad."

I took the letter over to Ellie's mom and asked if I could speak to Ellie's dad. He would not see me. So, Ellie's mom took the letter into her husband and came back out to speak with me. As we were talking about the funeral (Ellie's mom requested that I perform her services) I heard this uncontrollable sobbing coming from the living room. The

wife ran in to find her husband holding the letter from Ellie. The letter contained these words, “Dear Dad, I am so sorry for all the pain I have caused you. I want you to know I have always loved you and I wanted you to know that it’s okay that you didn’t want to come to see me. Love, Ellie.”

Every time I think of this young lady, I think of the precious moments her dad could have spent with her. Sometimes we need to put the past behind us and forgive the things that we say to each other because of addiction.

Jake was a young man that wanted to be loved by others. He was in his teens when I first met him. Like so many others, Jake started out using marijuana then went on to using pain medicine after an accident. Like many parents, Jake’s parents didn’t believe he had a problem. Jake ended up going to prison for drug charges. In prison he worked out a lot at the gym. By the time he was released, he was off the drugs and wanted to change his life. He moved out of the community and found a church that he wanted to be part of. Everyone loved Jake...the church youth, their parents and the pastor. But there was one small problem. Jake told a lie. He never mentioned to anyone that he was in prison. Instead, he told everyone he was an Army Ranger. Oh, Jake looked the part and thought his secret would never be found out. He was off the drugs and life was good. But things changed very quickly. Jake found out he had cancer and the prognosis was not good. Everyone was praying but Jake passed away at a very young age. Jake’s family was crushed, as was the church and all of Jake’s friends.

Jake's father requested that I be part of the funeral service. I agreed and waited for the pastor to contact me. As we talked, the pastor said something that shook my soul. He told me he had contacted the Army and that they would be doing the folding of the flag and that his wife was going to read a letter about his service to the Army. The funeral was going to be held in the community where Jake grew up so people knew that Jake went to prison and that he was never in the Army. I was shocked and now found myself in the middle of what could very well be another tragedy for Jake's family, the pastor and the entire church. After a lot of prayer about what I should do, I called the pastor back. I explained the true story about Jake's past and I remember the pastor's words, or should I say his word, which was, "WHAT?" The pastor decided he would read a scripture at the cemetery. I spoke to Jake's wife. She decided not to read the letter.

The funeral home was packed for Jake's service. I didn't know how I was going to pull this off without hurting a lot of people. So, my opening words were, "What would you do to be accepted?" From that point on I talked about how Jake wanted to be accepted by Christ and how he changed his life. I spoke about his service in the church and with the youth. To make this short, no one said a word about Jake's past and everyone was well pleased with the service. No one was hurt and there was no harm done to anyone. I did the best I could to let everyone know that Jake was like an Army Ranger in God's Army.

The truth is that these young men and women want so much to be like others. To be normal and to be loved and accepted. Jake touched the lives of so many kids during

his life and was truly a good Christian. I am sure that if Jake had not had cancer that one day he would have told the truth to everyone, but time ran out for him. Jake was one of the whosoever.

Like I said, I could tell stories all day about good kids who made bad decisions. They will always be good kids. They simply made a bad choice and paid the consequences.

MY SON JOSHUA

Everyone goes through problems in life; no matter who you are. Some we can laugh at while others can derail us for life. We as parents have tried everything under the sun to keep our children away from drugs. As an undercover narcotics agent and an advocate against drugs, my son became an addict and a dealer. He lost his innocence. People didn't trust him, his friends shunned him and so did the neighbors. However, his mother and I were willing to stick it out. And for the record, the journey has been long and hard. My son has made bad choices in life, but he is and always will be my son. Even as the pastor of a church, I have been very open about my son's addiction. Here is his story.

Joshua started out using marijuana. Then it became a little drinking and marijuana. I never expected or even imagined that Josh would become involved with heroin, but I suspected it over time. Slowly, he started 'losing' a lot of his personal things like a new coat that he got for Christmas, a headset and his favorite games that he played with all the time. Then he started 'losing' money. He started coming home late. His mother and I tried reasoning,

education and punishment. But Joshua got better with his lies and better at hiding his drugs. Eventually, he moved out with friends and our control over him as parents was lost forever. I never saw much of him after that. His contact was limited unless he wanted something. But one day he came to me with one of his friends and said, "Dad I have a heroin problem." I pointed to his friend and said, "You get out of here," as I felt my world coming to an abrupt halt. I thought, "How could this happen? Not with my son. He knew the dangers of drug addiction. I was the undercover narcotics agent who put my life on the line, so this would not happen!" I never saw it coming. I felt this great emptiness come over me as I hugged my son and said, "We have a heroin problem." I knew that moment that life would be very hard for him and his chance of survival was not good. I knew in my heart that the son I raised was gone forever. The boy I had now would be facing a life of torment and a life of crime. From that day on, everything went downhill. The dreams I had for my son simply vanished. His appearance was no longer that of a college kid. He was losing weight, not eating and not taking care of himself. Put mildly, he looked like the walking dead. I saw him living on the street and my heart was broken. I begged, I cried, and I reported who the dealers were. Every day was a fight to keep him alive. He would go into a drug treatment program and things went well for a few weeks. But, his demons kept coming back.

Fast forward 15 years. Most of Joshua's friends have died as a result of drugs. His friend that was with him the day he told me he had a problem passed away in 2017. He was in his early 40's. Joshua is still alive but we almost lost him a number of times over the years. The most recent incident

occurred on Friday, October 13, 2017. Joshua's girlfriend found him unresponsive in his bathroom. The EMT's could not get him to respond; his lips were blue, and his face was the color of ash. Joshua was given two shots of Narcan and placed on a ventilator. Two days later, the ventilator was removed, and Joshua was released from the hospital. Joshua tells me the incident was not drug related. He says it was the flu or an infection. Refer back to the section, "Why Addicts Lie."

The moment I received the call about my son, it had been expected. After the call I did what I was taught to do. I walked over to the church, sat down in a pew and had a talk with God. At that time, Joshua was still on the ventilator. I was at peace with myself. I remember how Joshua would play in the church and how as a family we worshiped together. The truth be told, I lived this scenario out a hundred times before over and over thinking that when I opened the door to his bedroom he would be dead.

At one point in time, I paid my sons bills and did everything for him. I did what I told other parents not to do. Things got so bad that I was getting myself into big financial trouble trying to keep him clean. I paid for treatment. I paid his rent. I paid car payments. You name it, I did it. My son has pushed me to the limit many times. He has broken into my home and into my shed. He took things to the pawn shop and sold them for pennies. He stole money from me and he stole my stamp collections. I always said to my son, "You must be near the bottom to steal from your parents."

One afternoon, years ago, he came to me and wanted money. He was so high that his eyes were almost closed. I grabbed my son and said, "Look at what you're doing to yourself!" Looking back, I realize that trying to reason with my son was not an option. You cannot reason with an addict. So, all of that changed. I had to learn tough love. I stopped the flow of money, I would not let him return home and I had him arrested for dealing heroin. There was a time he said to me, "If you get me arrested I will never talk to you again." I said, "If you die you will never talk to me again." Josh spent two years in prison. I refused to bail him out of jail. I refused to pay his fine. And I refused to get him an attorney.

Please don't get me wrong, I love my son but I am now 73 years old. I am so tired of the drama, the lies and the broken promises. I decided to put the war horse out to pasture. I will never give up on him. I will never stop loving him. And I will never stop praying for him. I have turned him over to God and put him under His care. I have done everything possible.

After years of research, I know now that it was the drugs that caused my son to lie and to steal and even to sell drugs to support his habit. At one point, Joshua was spending \$6,000 a month on heroin. He was always chasing the high. My son lives today but the only thing that keeps me going is that Joshua, like your son or daughter, is one of the whosoever. Our children will make bad decisions in life. But the decision to use drugs could make your son or daughter like Jekyll and Hyde. They have no idea the pain we live with everyday hoping and praying that they will somehow see the light before it's too late. My son will

always be a big part of my life. I will love him like I only have a day left to love him; because that is all that I may have...one more day.

No matter what my son has become, I will always love him. I will continue to try to help my son face reality, to try and prevent confrontation with others and to realize in a nice way how he affects the lives of everyone around him. But here is his response every time I reach out. My son requested that I relay a message to everyone in case something happens to him. I vowed to keep that promise, but my son never knew how I felt by making it. Joshua will say, "Pop, if anything happens to me, please tell the people I loved to party." The drugs took the young man that I had high hopes for and destroyed his life and our family's life. So now I wait for that phone call or the knock on my door that will again change my life forever.

PASSING JUDGMENT

When you read this next poem, it may help you understand how your child may have been feeling. The words apply to everyone who has felt the judgment of someone else. It may help you to tap into the hearts and minds of the whosoever that we encounter each and every day. Maybe you experienced a similar situation yourself at some point in your life. We are all whosoever. The author is unknown, but the pain that is felt through the author's words is known to many.

You think you have the right to judge, but you don't know me. You never could understand the mountains I

had to climb or the valleys that I've been in. You never knew my burdens, and you never knew my pain. And God knows you never knew my sadness. Yes, I am sorry for the things I've done but I can't change them now. My mountains were too high, and my valleys were too deep. That smile I had upon my face, why it was only just a mask. For I knew deep within my heart the judgment you had passed. Your smile, it wasn't real. And your heart, it wasn't warm. For in your eyes I could see your judgment and your scorn. So my parting words I say to you as you walk down the street; stop pointing fingers and judging people that you will never meet. For in this life some may stumble and some may fall, but in the end, it is God that judges all.

I remember a service I did on a Sunday morning. It was about Peter's actions right after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter did everything possible to show people he was not affiliated in any way with Christ. My closing words to the congregation were about how easy it was for me to do this sermon. I was looking for Peter's faults. People will judge people simply because they can.

I remember a young man who came to see me for drug and alcohol classes. My first impression was that the young man was street smart. He had a tattoo just below his hairline. There was no way anyone would miss it. I got to know this young man and invited him to our church. He took me up on the invitation. On that Sunday morning the young man was wearing a hat and had it pulled down so that the tattoo was covered. Now I was sure that people would notice him wearing his hat during the service, so I walked over to him and welcomed him to our church. I then ask, "Why the hat"? The young man said, "I didn't want to

embarrass you". I said, "Your tattoo tells a lot about you. We don't judge here." He took the hat off, got to know the church people, and accepted Christ. Today he owns his own business and still attends our church.

I have worked with several young men and women who now have AIDS; or who have died from AIDS. One thing that has opened my eyes is that most of the AIDS patients never wanted their family members to find out about the dreaded illness. Why? Because of what people will think and say. Isn't it bad enough that a person in your life is dying? Can you image someone having to face death alone; without any family or friends around? There was another young man I knew who was dying from AIDS. I saw him so sick and so afraid, yet he wanted no one to know just how sick he really was. For several months he stayed in contact with me. We often spoke of how this illness would crush his family if they knew he had AIDS. After a week of not hearing from him, I called his mother. She told me that he was fine and that he moved to California. When I hung up the phone, I knew in my heart that he wanted to die without anyone knowing he had AIDS. His mother gave me his phone number and I left messages week after week, but he never called me back. About eighteen months later, I received a message from his mother saying that he had died. After his death, his family found out he had AIDS. The saddest thing was not that Michael had died, but that he died without his family being with him.

So what do we do? It's very simple. It's called unconditional love. It does not matter if the person is your friend, your neighbor, son, daughter, father or mother. Love them unconditionally. Remember we are not the judge or the jury. People have no right to pass judgment on anyone. My

advice is to ask if any of these people ever read the following scripture.

¹Judge not, that ye be not judged. ²For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. ³And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ⁴Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? ⁵Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5).

Instead of passing judgment, understand that we are all whosoever. We all make bad choices. Sometimes they don't catch up to us right away, but rest assured, they will catch up to us. Our job is to inspire others and lift them up with words of encouragement. A kind word, a friendly smile, a forgiving heart can change the course of someone's life.

CHAPTER 3

OVERCOMING ADDICTION

CAN MY CHILD OVERCOME ADDICTION?

It is my opinion that early intervention could make a big difference in the person's entire future. So, the answer is yes, a person can overcome addiction if the addiction is in the early stages and depending on what drug is used.

It is very important for parents to understand that drugs can take the life of your child the very first time they use. This depends on what drug (or combination of drugs) was used, the amount that was taken and the potency of the drug. A dealer could very well give an addict what is known on the street as a 'hot shot.' This means that the amount of the drug looks to be the same however, the potency is much higher than the addict is accustomed to using. As a street rule this 'hot shot' is only used if the dealer is owed money or if the dealer thinks the addict is a police informant. In many cases, the addict will not survive the effects of the hot shot. Here is another true story. A tragic end to a very young life.

Zack was 18 years old and had experimented with drugs on and off. One day his friend introduced him to heroin. What the friend did not know was that you never give the same dose of heroin that you are taking to someone who has never used it before. Zack went into a coma and died two days later.

Also understand that no program can make a promise that someone will not go back to using drugs. Once the drug takes control, the urge to use again will last a lifetime. But, if proper treatment is not administered quickly, relapse is sure to occur.

Here are the cold hard facts about addiction. Sadly, many do not stay in recovery. From what I have experienced, 20% of addicts will remain clean after treatment. That means 80% will go in and out of treatment programs. But no matter what people tell you, no one has all of the answers. Never give up hope and never stop praying for your children.

EDUCATION AND TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Now we come to reopening that wound I spoke about. If your son or daughter really needs treatment for drug addiction and they have no money or insurance, they most likely will not be able to get the help they really need. Why is that? In my opinion, people with substance abuse problems are nothing more than cash cows for treatment centers.

Here is a fact that many Marylanders do not know. If you or anyone you know gets a DUI, they must attend level one .05 education in a certified program. Ask any of the law makers that voted for this bill and you will find that certified alcohol education programs come under treatment programs. WOW! That means a person is going to treatment even if they don't need treatment. What does that really mean? It means these money grubbing treatment programs want more money! Fact... insurance companies would never pay for alcohol education. So, what did the money grubbers do? They got together and had a bill passed putting early intervention for DUI's as treatment for one reason and one reason only...to take more money from your insurance. Many addicts do not have funds or insurance to pay for treatment. I, like many parents, found that addicts are left to fend for themselves.

So here is the problem as I see it. Your son or daughter goes out to a party, baby shower, ball game, you name it, and they are charged with a DUI. They will be in treatment and there is nothing anyone can do about it until the laws are changed back. I have an e-mail from a representative from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (these are the people that control treatment programs in Maryland). I requested a list of programs where indigent people could receive help in finding free treatment programs for first time DUI or for addicts needing treatment. The email response I received was simply, "There are no free programs, nor do I know of any reduced programs in Maryland."

No free programs? Where is the money going? This leads to other questions. I contacted Baltimore County by sending a Freedom of Information Act requesting a list of

free programs for the indigent in Baltimore County. They never answered my request. If you check this information out you will find as I did, everything is about the money. Take a moment and research MADC. This is a select group of treatment providers. Look into their tax status. Most are tax exempt.

I cannot imagine the loneliness and despair that an addict goes through during their lifetime. I do know that the support of family and friends is critical in getting people into treatment programs and helping them to stay drug free. Young people need to know that someone does care about them. They need to know that God does not make junk and their lives can change with a little guidance and a lot of desire. Never give up on your kids. No matter what anyone says, never give up on them!

Please visit my website at www.marylandduiclass.com and click on treatment programs for information about where you or a loved one can find help.

WHY DIDN'T THE PROBATION OFFICER DO ANYTHING FOR MY SON/DAUGHTER?

I am no fan of probation. I know for a fact that some probation officers in Maryland have filed false reports to state agencies; they are collecting money for drug testing that is never provided; they have told outright lies to judges; and they are hardly there when the offenders go in for their appointments. This in itself could cause a relapse for any offender.

I have students that have told me firsthand that they have been approached by their probation officer to do free work for them. Some have worked at probation agent's homes, worked on their probation agent's vehicles and one agent had an offender paint their home and then requested that they paint the officer's mothers-in-law house! Why would this happen you may ask? If the offender agreed to do free work for the agent, the agent would turn their head if the offender was in violation of their parole.

Here is what probation agents are doing. First, they are over loaded with cases. Then they are closing cases of repeat offenders. Many of your questions involve state agencies. There are some things you need to know in order to understand the real issues that are going on in our state today.

The following has been documented in a Federal Lawsuit that I filed against the State of Maryland on November 13, 2013. It is Federal Case# CCB 14-3501, Wright v. Maynard. I requested a Federal Grand Jury Investigation on Maryland State Agencies, specifically, the Department of Parole and Probation and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, for a number of violations that have been occurring over the years. The lawsuit served several purposes: 1) to have a documented record of all events that took place; 2) to bring to light major public safety issues; 3) to have an accurate record that shows just how corrupt Maryland really is; and 4) to demand change in a system that is broken when it comes to taking care of the addict and his or her families. It is now 2018 and still nothing has been done about the facts you are about to read. My research came from files and documents I have kept over

the past forty-five years. The documents clearly show that money was the biggest issue for State Agencies.

Let me introduce you to the people who protect state employees, or should I say, “Maryland’s Cash Cows.” The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is responsible for treatment programs in Maryland, along with many other agencies. In my opinion, this agency has helped cover up the horrors of what is going on in treatment programs and has not protected the people in Maryland like they took an oath to do. Then you have the Department of Parole and Probation. It is also my opinion that this agency has helped cover up the problems within this State Agency and has not protected the tax payers of Maryland.

ENOUGH OF THE POLITICS LET’S GET TO THE REAL REASON THIS SECTION IS IN THE BOOK.

Because treatment has always been an issue for offenders, our church started the Alpha Program, a drug and alcohol education program, to assist offenders in finding treatment. This program has been said to be a “Model for the State of Maryland” and has been used by the state for well over thirty years. The biggest user of this program was the Department of Parole and Probation. One day, I happened to notice that students who were coming to the Alpha Program would enroll and then never come back to class.

One of my students informed me that a repeat DUI offender was working at a politician’s restaurant and not going to treatment. After checking, I found the information to be correct, so I contacted Parole and Probation. What

happened next will amaze you. Remember, everything has been documented in the Federal Lawsuit. You can read the names of supervisors involved and how Maryland has covered up the death of children and major public safety issues.

WARNINGS WERE SENT TO SUPERVISORS AT PROBATION THAT CATASTROPHIC EVENTS WOULD OCCUR IF POLICIES WERE NOT CHANGED ABOUT CASE DUMPING. THE STATE IGNORED THE WARNINGS.

Then it happened... a three-year-old girl was killed on 695 near the Anne Arundel County exit by a drunk driver that did not receive the treatment she needed. She was one of the students in my class (she also was killed in the accident). You would think that the state would do something. They did. They increased the retaliation against me and the church program for exposing major problems of Maryland Corruption. The more they pushed the more I pushed back. Not even the death of that child would stop this cover up by the State.

Then a second occurrence happened... an eight-year-old child was raped, beaten and strangled to death in Cecil County. It appeared the offender was on probation but was not being properly supervised. Still nothing changed.

Another occurrence... another student in my class needed treatment. I begged the state to help this young man find a program. They did nothing to help him. He has since been

accused of stabbing a lady thirty-four times and taking her life.

And another occurrence... a man hears voices that tell him to go into a store and kill the first man he sees. This man was previously arrested and spent some time in jail. He was released without receiving proper treatment.

I CONTINUED TO COMPLAIN ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES.

Maryland has a very low rating in transparency. The more I made waves the tougher things got. If you step on the toes of politicians, they can make your life miserable. They retaliated. The State sent a cease and desist order to close down the church Alpha Program. I requested that the State charge me for operating an illegal treatment program, but they simply ignored my request.

CASE DUMPING CREATES A NEW PROBLEM FOR PROBATION

If that wasn't bad enough the probation agents were dumping cases of repeat offenders back into our communities. Agents were filing false reports with the Motor Vehicle Administration reporting that repeat offenders completed a treatment program when in fact they had never gone to treatment.

If the offenders were in compliance, why did agents make up false names of Treatment Programs and put them on MVA official documents that permitted repeat offenders to obtain a Maryland Driver's License?

To put this in perspective, I am not talking about a few cases. I am talking about hundreds of cases that have been dropped by probation officers who lied to the courts and sent them false reports. The reason they filed these reports was because they closed the cases and the judges were lied to by another false report stating the offenders were in compliance with the courts. Everyone has ignored this problem in the present administration. So, don't except anything from probation. If you know anyone who has lost a child because of a DUI get in contact with me. Maybe the person involved has a Maryland driver's license that should not have one.

In dealing with many of my students and their probation officers, it is a shame that the probation officers' only concern was collecting money from offenders for the state of Maryland. I would like to see probation agents held accountable for the gross negligence in supervising people who have drug or alcohol problems. As of December 2017, I have lost 118 of my students to drugs and alcohol. One hundred eighteen lives lost because many could not obtain treatment. The fight continues.

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION / SUICIDE

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death..." (Matthew 26:38, NIV).

While under the influence of drugs or alcohol, people may take risks that they ordinarily would not take. Many people abuse drugs or alcohol in an attempt to relieve the

symptoms of depression or other mental health conditions. Ask any addict and they will tell you about depression. My son Joshua defined depression as “anger turned inside out”. Abusing alcohol or sedatives can also trigger symptoms of depression, increasing the risk of suicide. In my book, The Consequences of Making Bad Decisions, it explains how the problems of everyday life just continue to pile up and life itself becomes a battle for a person addicted to drugs or alcohol.

UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION

At times we have all felt temporary sadness, loneliness and despair triggered by certain events that occur in our lives. And this is normal. However, when those feelings continue to persist over time, and start to interfere with a person’s quality of life, the person may be suffering from depression. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, depression is a common, but serious mood disorder. It can cause symptoms that effect how a person feels, thinks and handles daily activities, such as; sleeping, eating or working. There are different categories of depression, but an episode could last for a year or longer. About 85% of people who experience an episode of depression will most likely suffer from future episodes. At least 8% of the American population suffers from serious depression at some point in their lives. Depression affects all people, no matter what sex, race or socioeconomic standing you came from. Depression can break up a marriage; cause a person to lose a job; or to even take his or her own life.

Although depression usually begins during a person's 20's or 30's, symptoms of depression may appear at any time, from childhood into old age. The illness may come on slowly, and then progressively get worse if not treated. Or, depression may erupt suddenly. This could happen in a few weeks or even a few days. A person with severe depression could appear confused, off balance and even frightened. Depression causes serious changes in a person's life and people with major depression may experience extreme emotional pain. A person with major depression may feel sadness nearly every day and you may often find them crying for no reason. Things that used to bring joy and happiness are no longer pleasurable to them.

Some depressed people complain of being spiritually or morally dead. A simple mirror seems to reflect someone ugly or repulsive. A depressed person may feel stupid, phony or even guilty of having deceived others.

Risk Factors for Depression Include:

- Personal or family history of depression
- Major life changes, trauma or stress
- Certain physical illnesses and medications

Common Symptoms of Depression Include:

- Depression usually alters a person's appetite. Most of the time the person suffering from depression will lose their appetite; however, a person may over eat.
- Sleep habits also often change. A person with depression may over sleep or they may only sleep for a few hours.

- A change in energy level is also common. For many people who suffer from depression, the morning hours will be the saddest part of the day. Some depressed people may feel overwhelmed. They may feel restless and even agitated. At times they may pace about the floors like a tiger in a cage. They may also be fidgety and at other times sluggish and inactive. At some point the person may experience great fatigue and appear to have lost all energy. They may also talk more slowly.
- It is common for a depressed person to have difficulty thinking. They may have memory problems and poor concentration.
- Low self-esteem is a cousin to depression. The feeling of helplessness and self-blame is also common. It is difficult for some depressed people to accept any form of minor criticism, for they see it as condemnation.
- Children may complain of stomachaches and headaches. They may be irritable and withdraw from family and friends. The child may also have changes in eating habits. They may no longer feel enthusiastic about school or other activities.
- The adolescent may also have mood swings, going from happy to sad feelings. Their sleep could also be disturbed, and they could have a lack of energy.
- In older people with depression, the complaints are usually more physical rather than emotional.
- A psychotic symptom is when a person experiences delusions and hallucinations. When these symptoms occur, this would indicate a severe illness.
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment.

- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts can occur. They say that about 15% of seriously depressed people commit suicide and many more attempt it.

So please remember, depression is an illness. Don't be so quick to judge people for the things that they do. The more you learn about depression the more you will start to understand and be able to pick up on symptoms that may indicate that a person is suffering from depression and should seek treatment.

If you think you or a loved one may be suffering from depression, start by making an appointment to see a doctor or health care provider. This could be a primary care practitioner or a health provider who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions.

When Hope Runs Out...

During the forty-five years that I have been working with the addicted population in my community, many of my students who were not able to get into treatment programs because of financing or the lack of insurance, sadly, took their own lives. The following information will provide an insight into the increased probability that a person who is addicted to drugs could be suicidal. Now we can add this problem to the long list of concerns we already have for our addicted children.

While suicide is a well-known risk for those suffering with mental health problems, it also requires attention for the

addicted population when an evaluation and treatment is considered.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Each year, about 44,965 Americans take their own lives. The cost of suicide in the United States alone is \$51 billion a year.

Additional Facts about Suicide in the U.S.

- The annual age-adjusted suicide rate is 13.5 per 100,000 individuals
- Men die by suicide 3.57 times more often than women
- On average, there are 123 suicides per day
- White males accounted for 7 out of 10 suicides in 2016
- Firearms account for 51% of all suicides
- The rate of suicide is highest in middle age, white men in particular

Depression is the number one risk factor for suicide. However, other mental health issues can also be factors when suicide occurs. Even if depression is not present with alcohol and drug abuse, it comes in a close 2nd.

If someone reports suicidal thoughts during an evaluation, the person doing the assessment or evaluation should make sure the patient is referred to a professional who deals with suicide. It is my opinion that at no time should any patient be permitted to walk out of an evaluation knowing he or she is thinking about taking their own life. The likelihood of a person taking their own life while on drugs or alcohol is about a one in three chance. Typically, the cause of death

is from opiates such as oxycodone or heroin, or from alcohol.

Warning signs of suicide according to Suicide.org:

- Appearing depressed or sad most of the time (untreated depression is the number one cause for suicide)
- Talking or writing about death or suicide
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling helpless
- Feeling strong anger or rage
- Feeling trapped – like there is no way out of a situation
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Exhibiting a change in personality
- Acting impulsively
- Losing interest in most activities
- Experiencing a change in sleeping habits
- Experiencing a change in eating habits
- Losing interest in most activities
- Performing poorly at work or in school
- Giving away prized possessions
- Writing a will
- Feeling excessive guilt or shame
- Acting recklessly

To learn more, visit the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website at:

<https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>. For information specific to the state of Maryland, visit: <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/state-fact-sheets/#Maryland>.

I encourage you to read the story about Stacy Culotta that was written by her mother, Diane. It is informative, yet heartbreaking. You can find Stacy's story in the chapter entitled, "In Loving Memory."

CHAPTER 4

WHEN THIS LIFE ENDS

A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

-- (Job 14:5, NIV).

WHAT IS DEATH?

Death is a separation, a natural parting of a body and soul. Death is the unknown trip that we must all take one day. Death is frightening for some, and a joy for others. Death is fear and loneliness. Death is pain and sadness. Death is real; it is not make-believe. Death comes in the morning, afternoon and at night. Death never takes a vacation. Death shows no favoritism. Death is one of the things we cannot control. Death robs us of the pleasures that should have happened but now never will; such as, going to your child's graduation or wedding. We never know when death will come; but we know it will come. And when it does, it will

bring a tremendous amount of pain and sorrow along with it.

The days of our years are three score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10).

In life, there is death. Understanding that is simple. However, accepting death can be difficult. No one *really* understands death. We understand that our bodies will die but what will happen to us? Where will we go? Is there more to life than what we know on earth? I believe there is. We will talk about that later on in the book. First, let's talk about what a person may be going through after losing a loved one.

THE DEATH OF A CHILD

Who do you think hurts more when a child dies, a father or a mother? Could a sibling feel the same hurt as a parent? What about a grandparent, uncle or aunt? What about a friend, a co-worker or a fellow student? I believe there is nothing in life more devastating than losing a child. If your child has died, then you will understand what a parent that has just lost a child is going through. I have spent countless hours trying to comfort parents who have lost children. Some of these deaths have been due to drugs.

Ask any parent who lost a child to drugs and they will tell you, "If I could only have my son or daughter back, I would somehow endure the pain all over again." The pain of disappointment; the sleepless nights wondering where

their child might be and if they are ever coming home; wondering if they are still alive or passed away in some alleyway. They would give all that they have just to have them back. Why would they do that? Because the pain of losing a child is a pain that you cannot compare to anything else in this world; you will simply never get over it.

Others have lost children due to illnesses and some losses have been very sudden. I remember having to tell a friend that her daughter had lost her life. I got the call on a cold January night. There had been an accident and a child had died. As my wife and I pulled into the driveway of Donna's home, I remember thinking that this was a visit that I did not want to make. I had to tell a mother that her daughter had lost her life while crossing the highway not far from their home. Donna had already been told that her daughter had died but she did not believe it. It would now be my job to convince Donna that her daughter Tammy had passed away. As I walked up to the back door I knew that as soon as I walked in Donna's life would be changed forever. Before I could knock, the door opened. The family and friends were expecting me. As soon as I saw Donna she started crying uncontrollably. Before I could say anything, Donna started yelling, "No! No!" She put her hands over her face and was crying. Everyone in that room could feel her pain. I placed my hand on her shoulder and said, "Donna, you know why I am here." Donna turned to me; I gave her a hug and as I did I whispered in her ear, "Tammy has died." Everyone was crying. I thought to myself, "How could this have happened?" A child dies every minute of the day. Questions are always left unanswered. Donna is a good Christian lady. And although it has been very hard for her, she has somehow managed to make it through the

years. I still visit Tammy's grave. In fact, Donna and I have made it a point to place flowers at the headstone throughout the year. Tammy was a beautiful child. I can still see the long line of cars with the headlights on as we slowly moved toward the cemetery. Had Tammy lived, she would most likely have her own family by now. However, on that cold January night many years ago, the Angel of Death took from my friend her child that was loved so much then and still is today.

We don't realize the pain, sadness and sorrow that a grieving parent will have for the rest of their lives. Parents are not supposed to bury their children. But when they do, life comes to a sudden stop. And it makes no difference how old the child is. When you lose your child, you lose your life also. Everything stops, and nothing is important. Things just have no meaning.

Others will think they know how you're feeling, but they won't. However; parents, try to remember that you are not the only one that has had death in your life. There will be so many people that will be affected by your child's death. They also hurt. They will miss them just as you will, but in a different way. They had to give up their plans as well. They feel abandoned, they feel lost and they are suffering too. If you have other children, they will surely have questions about the death of their sibling. Be honest with them. And remember, that you still need to be there for them! And don't forget about your own parents, the grandparents of the child who has died. They will feel a double burden of pain. First, they see you, their son or daughter, in so much pain and on top of that, they are

suffering their own pain because of the loss of their grandchild. They too will be searching for answers.

A SIMPLE QUESTION – WHY?

The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away...

-- (Isaiah 57:1).

They say a simple question deserves a simple answer. So why did this happen? Why? You will always ask that same question, and you will ask it over and over again. Why did God take them? Why would God bring people into our lives only to take them away from us? We can speculate, and we can make educated guesses but no one can provide an exact answer as to why things happen. The only One who can answer that question is God. This one question will remain in your heart forever; right up until Judgment Day. We must have faith in God and believe that all things happen for his glory and that good will rise from our sorrows.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5).

⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

¹²For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face

to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:9-12).

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28).

Take a few moments and reflect on the following words. This scripture will help you understand the events in everyday life and a clue as to why things happen.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ²A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; ³A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; ⁷A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

I can only say that you will never be complete again. Oh, the tears will stop, but the pain will always be there. Today it is a time for you to just survive. So, do whatever it takes because tomorrow you will face another battle.

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS AFTER A LOSS

When your loved one died you grieved, you cried and you suffered. The reality is... you are still suffering. You are hurting and hurting means that you have loved. The death of a loved one is a traumatic, life altering event. After a death, a new life begins for both the deceased and those who are left behind to grieve. Let's first talk about how your life has changed. Let me ask you some questions about how you are feeling or have been feeling. Do you feel anger? Are you in denial over what has happened? Do you have feelings of guilt? Are you feeling depressed? Are you angry with God? Are you shutting out family and friends? Do you feel sick and run down? Do you sit and cry for hours at a time? Do you go to the cemetery every day?

All you can do is think about them. You think about the things you used to do together and the places you visited. And then you think about all of the things that could have been. It may seem like you cannot move on. But things are moving faster than you think. Before you know it, a few months will have passed and then a year. My God! Where has the time gone? Even after a year you will still be numb. So, how long will you feel this way? How long will you continue to blame yourself? No one can answer that for you. We are all different. For some people it may take longer than others.

Most of the things you are experiencing are normal. Everyone will go through some of the same things you are going through. Every day will be a challenge for you. Some days will be better than others; some will be worse. You have come a long way. You have a long way to go. But the

day will come. How do you get to that point? First you must be ready to go there. If you are ready, then let's get started.

THE FIVE STAGES OF DYING

According to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who is considered to be an expert on the topic of death and dying, there are five stages of grief, commonly referred to as the "5 Stages of Dying." If you are looking for a more in-depth understanding, specifically about death and dying, I do recommend her book, On Death and Dying. We used her books in my death and dying classes and they were found to be very helpful.

The five stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Let's talk about each stage and the various emotional responses people tend to go through during each one. It is important to note that you may not experience every stage. Or, you may go through them in a different order. It is common to progress from one stage to another and then revert back to the previous stage. This too is normal.

Denial

During this first stage, the grieving person reacts with denial or disbelief to what has happened. This is most common in occurrences of sudden loss, such as a car accident. It is also common at the time when someone is diagnosed with a terminal or non-curable disease. Shock and numbness are two other emotions that can be used to describe this particular stage of grief. After the shock has

worn off, pain, sadness and guilt may be associated with this stage.

The reality is that your loved one has died. You have just not accepted their death. When we accept that death has occurred and that our loved one will not be coming home, the grieving process will begin.

You have to understand that there have been no mistakes; your loved one is not coming back. Your loved one has not fallen asleep. They are not away on some vacation. Why? Because they have died. Try to say that. “My loved one has died and is not coming back.” Once the reality of the death has sunk in, you may become hysterical. You may have uncontrollable tears. You may feel an unbearable sadness that brings darkness to your every moment. Let us say the words again. “My loved one has died.” Now let’s say these words. “But the love we had for each other will never die.” It’s okay if you cry. And it’s okay if you feel sadness at this moment. You need to express your feelings. Your grief is not a weakness and the love you have for the one who has passed away will always stay with you.

Anger

This is the most difficult of the five stages to manage and keep under control. “Anger comes when the surviving person realizes denial is no longer an option. People in this stage may lash out at those around them that are trying to provide support,” says Kubler-Ross. Human nature wants to blame someone else for the loss. This is the stage at which people often ask these questions: “Why me?” or, “Why am I here?” or “Who would care if I were gone?”

This is the most dangerous stage for the grieving person as they may become a danger to themselves or others.

The grief is so intense that it will most likely take a physical toll on you. You may feel so angry that you find yourself yelling; or maybe banging your fists against the wall. Your agitation goes beyond the grave. You are angry with God and everyone and everything else in the world. It is everyone's fault. But no one is taking the blame. God has taken your loved one away from you! And the guy down the road who sells drugs is still alive. You have now regressed back to the very first day when you asked this very same question. WHY? It's as if no one really cares. Your anger goes from the doctors, to the clergy; from the clergy to the funeral director; from the funeral director to your family. And if your child's death was in part because of their own actions; you may feel anger toward them. It seems to never end. Then, like an addiction, it starts all over again.

You now find fault in things around you. The grave marker is not right. The funeral costs too much. And none of your neighbors ever call. Then, you think for a moment, "I have blamed everyone, except for myself. Yes! It was me that caused this horrible thing to happen." "It's my fault." Guilt has now moved into your life. You may even feel guilty because you are living and your loved one has died.

Remember, it is not your fault. You did not cause their death. You cannot control life or the decisions they made. Please, stop blaming yourself and others. What has happened has happened. And you cannot change that. Not now, not later, not ever. We can only control things in the

make-believe world. You are in the real world now. And it's good to have you back.

Many people will blame God for their loved one passing away. This is not unusual. Do you think God let you down? Even Martha questioned Jesus about the death of her brother.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. (John 11:21).

I guess we need someone who controls the world to blame. But being mad at God will not bring your loved one back. The death happened for a reason. There is a question you should consider. Why are you mad at God? Were you given a promise the rest of us did not receive? Did God say to you, "I will never take them away?" The answer is a simple one, yet accepting it is difficult. What God gave to you, to us, was a loan. They were His all along. They were not given to you to keep forever. God just let you have them for a short time. So now, you must find a way to move on without them.

Bargaining

Bargaining almost always involves a conversation, connection, or a wish to a higher power for help to take away a person's pain. This may include a God or other higher power of a paranormal sort. This is when a patient's religion may play a role in the way that a person mourns a loss. This may either speed up or slow down the mourning process.

This stage can occur before or after a loss. It is an attempt for a person to alter or delay the outcome of the situation. The person is attempting to regain control through negotiation. For example, a person who has just been told that they have a terminal illness may try to negotiate with God. They may say, "God, please, if you heal me, I will become a better Christian." A person could say the same thing when a loved one is dying.

I remember my brother saying to me just before his daughter died with cancer, "You can't change this?" Amanda was only four years old when she died. My brother, his wife and our family would have paid a handsome price to buy Amanda back from the Angel of Death. However, there was no bargaining. Our pleas to keep her were not answered; not by God or by anyone else.

A person who has experienced a loss may try to identify ways in which they could have handled the situation more effectively. They begin questioning what they could have or should have done differently to prevent the loss. The 'if only', 'what if' and the 'I should have' statements are common and can bring forth feelings of guilt and more anguish. You may be saying, "I should have been there." "If only I would have checked on them." "I should have told him/her not to go." "I even told him/her to have a good time." "If only I would have said, 'you're not going'." "Oh, God, it's my fault!" "I caused his/her death." You constantly play the events leading to their death over and over again in your mind hoping for a different outcome. When you realize that the outcome is not going to change, you then might begin thinking, "Oh, God, why couldn't it

have been me?" WHY? You may be getting upset right now.

When a person realizes that no bargaining can take place, they will most likely move to the next stage, depression.

Depression

This stage has the most potential for turning into grief. According to Kubler-Ross it is at this point that a person may realize his or her certain death and may recognize that the situation is hopeless. When dealing with the loss of a loved one, depression is a normal and appropriate response to such a loss. It is indeed a very depressing time. This stage may feel as if it is lasting forever. You will typically withdraw from life for a while.

Deep in the pit of your stomach you feel a sensation of emptiness. Your chest feels tight. Your heart beats faster than ever before. You cannot catch your breath. Your mouth is dry, your head is pounding. You think, "Oh, God! Please help me. I can't live another day without them." Finally, you think, death has come for you! Then you realize you have felt this way for months. Your pain has been hidden by the paralysis of death. Death is not coming for you yet. This is just a new day. This is all part of the sadness that comes with losing a loved one.

People may get to the depression stage earlier or later than expected, but this is not abnormal, as someone would think. Everyone grieves in their own unique way and depression is a normal part of the grieving process. Emotions like emptiness, isolation, helplessness and extreme sadness are common during this stage.

It is most important to understand the difference between normal sadness and clinical depression. If you have not read the section on Understanding Depression in Chapter 3, please go back and read it.

Acceptance

This is the place that everyone strives to reach. This is the final stage and is considered to be the transition back to regular, normal life. This is the time in which the person moves on from whatever or whoever they are grieving. Everyone going through this process is headed for this destination sooner or later. For the dying individual, this is the stage at which they accept things for what they are and they make peace with the world. For the grieving individual, they accept the situation and are able to go on with their life. They have accepted the loss as part of life, although with the understanding that life will now be led in a different way.

My mother taught me a prayer when I was a child. And I really never gave much thought to it. That is until now!

*If I should die before I wake, I wonder how this world
would do without me? Would the sun still rise like
always? Would the birds still sing their love songs?
Would the leaves still fall from the trees in autumn?
And would the summer rain still bring the smell of
freshness in the air?*

*If I should die before I wake, would the flowers still
have the smell of spring? And would the snow still fall
on a cold winter's night? Would the geese still fly south*

in the wintertime? If I should die before I wake, would children still laugh and sing? Yes! If I die before I wake, all of these things will still go on.

Live in the past if you like, but always come back to the ones that are still here and love you. You know who they are. They are your children, your grandchildren, they are the people at the mall that you laughed with, they are your neighbors that you have spent countless hours with, and they are the people at church that you prayed with. They are the kids that play in the alley, the police officer that came to your aid. The minister from your church, the mail man, they are called friends. So please don't stay away too long. They need your wisdom and the friendly smile that you give to everyone. So now, you must find a way to move on.

I am not asking you to forget your loved one. We will never forget our loved ones. But God took them home and you are still here. You must remember to take care of yourself. I just want to get you functioning again. Your loved one is gone but you still have things to do. Your loved one would want you to enjoy life. Take time to cry; take time to laugh and take time to remember. Take time to be angry; take time to be happy and again, take time to remember. Remember what? Remember the good times, forget the bad times. Use the memories your loved one left for you. And don't ever stop loving; just stop worrying about what others think. And if today is a day to cry then you must cry. Go with your feelings. Just remember, you are not ending a relationship. The relationship will always be there. You're just seeing it now in another dimension.

Will the pain ever go away? Sure, the tears will stop but the suffering will never completely end. Part of you will always be sad. We just learn to live with the pain. You will make it! Remember, love never ends!

CHAPTER 5

IN LOVING MEMORY

The following stories were written about some really great kids. I was privileged to have personally known them all. They each struggled and sadly lost their battle with addiction. These stories are very emotional. You will be able to feel the pain and suffering through the words of those who wrote them. Their struggle to move on with their own lives continues to this day. You may want to grab a few more tissues.

Laughter can conceal a heavy heart, but when the laughter ends, the grief remains. (Proverbs 14:13, NLT).

Jason Balasus

January 7, 1974 – February 21, 2016

Written by: Jackie Rineer, Jason's sister

Losing my younger brother has been harder than I ever imagined. Not a day goes by that I don't miss him. Like so many other addicts, he was much more than his disease. He had the biggest heart and gave everyone a chance. He was so loving. He treated friends like brothers; his family meant

the world to him; and he loved animals. He just didn't love himself.

We tried so hard to help him. Our mom gave him what he needed but that wasn't the answer. She tried tough love. That wasn't the answer. I tried to help him see there is beauty in life. I would take him hiking and horseback riding; but that wasn't the answer. What was the answer? Only Jason would know that, and he never got the opportunity to find out.

Talk with any of his friends and you will hear the same thing. He was great! He was so thoughtful, so kind, so funny. None of that matters now really. We all have a huge hole in our hearts that can never be replaced. Each passing day gets a little easier and a little harder. Harder knowing he has been gone from our lives so long; it just still seems so unreal.

If you are an addict, please get help! If you love your family, friends, whomever it may be, please get help! Allow someone to help you see you are worth it. Allow someone to show you how to love yourself. Everyone deserves to be happy and that includes you! You are worth it.

Harry Bayne III

September 21, 1993 – January 14, 2011

Written by: Linda Cugler, Harry's mother

There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about my son. About how much I miss him, and about what he would be doing right now. I wonder about his graduating college and what he would have become as a young man. Would he

be married and have children? With his death, I'm left with an emptiness that I don't believe will ever be filled.

It has been really hard to keep going after the death of my child. I struggle every day with my grief. I sometimes cry; I sometimes laugh; sometimes I get depressed; but somehow, I keep going. There was even a time when my depression got so bad I even contemplated ending it all on the first anniversary of Harry's death. I even thought about how I was going to do it, even where and when.

But after some further consideration, I thought about my husband, my three girls, my grandkids and my brothers. I thought about how much ending my life would affect them. I then realized that I could not put them through that. Although not in the same way as I had, they all had to deal with the trauma of Harry's death. I couldn't bring myself to put them through another ordeal like that again.

Knowing the love of my family helped me to cope with the aftermath of my son's death. They gave me a reason to live on. There are days when I cried, and they cried along with me; I hurt and they felt my hurt; and when I had bad days, they were all there to support me. They are why I'm still here. I know I need them and I'm positive they need me. I believe that I am a strong woman and that I need to show my family that you can get through almost any of life's tragedies with the love and support that your family and friends can give you.

My brother Ron gave me very good advice. He suggested that I should write about my feelings concerning Harry's death. And shortly after my son's death, I did that, and it helped me a lot. Writing about his death helped me put my pent-up feelings of hopelessness, despair and sadness into

something that I could actually put out there for me to examine, for me to consciously see and not just internally obsess over. I will never truly get over my son's death, but with each passing day, and with the love of my family, it hurts a little less. It's been seven years since Harry passed, but it still seems like it was just yesterday.

Stacy Marie Culotta

September 5, 1979 – October 31, 2016

Written by: Diane Culotta, Stacy's mother

Stacy was such a beautiful baby...looked like a perfect Italian beauty. She had a great childhood, even as a grown up, her and her brother Kris would tell people, "We had a perfect childhood. Disney vacations, cruises, anything a kid could want." Life became complicated when Stacy was 17. I knew she smoked pot, but nothing beyond that, until that fateful day she met a monster at the gas station. She kept this new guy secret for a little while, and when we finally did get to meet him, that "19-year-old guy" was really a 28 year old MONSTER. He had a very long criminal history, I won't mention his name, but everyone in the Dundalk / Essex area knows the terror he caused when his life finally came to an end. I believe this pivotal moment in Stacy's life broke her, and she never fully recovered. We did find out that he had been raping her, beating and choking her with threats like, "If you tell your parents about me or break up with me, I'll set your house on fire with them in it and make you watch."

That guilt and shame began her downward spiral of drugs and mental illness. She immediately turned to heroin, thanks to this evil man's cousin. She went to over 30 rehab

facilities before we stopped counting. We even flew her to a rehab facility in Florida. She tried methadone, buprenorphine, anything to get clean. Things got even worse when she got involved in a relationship, bought a house, had a great job, had a baby boy, and then lost it all. I think the depression really reared its head, and she started with several psych drugs, along with that poison... anxiety meds, which I call "hell in a pill" ... you can never get off of it and doctors prescribe it every day.

We left no stone unturned trying to save her from herself, but in the end, PTSD (from the evil boyfriend), bi-polar, depression, addiction and her guilt finally won. My husband and I spent almost 20 years tracking down every drug dealer in Baltimore City, something most parents think they would never do, but love is stronger than fear, believe me... you will do ANYTHING to save your child.

We moved to Florida, always had a dream of living in that sunshine state, hoping too, that taking Stacy and her son to live with us and getting her out of Baltimore would break the cycle of drugs and depression. Even after moving, we took her to several rehabs, some were dual diagnosed, so we thought "Yes, this is what will fix her." Parents DON'T BELIEVE THAT LIE! While in one facility, (she'd been there at least 4 different times) on two different occasions, she tried to hang herself. Both times they found her in time, only to release her with a new bag of meds and a pat on the back. The crazy part is, they DON'T TELL YOU that your daughter tried to kill herself, nope... and on the last admission, in October 2016, we had went to the state to ask for help to have her committed. She was in there for almost 9 days, trying to hang herself once again. The guilt we carry about that is immense!!! And again, we were NOT

told about this, just a new bag of meds and “Good luck Stacy.”

She was released on Sunday, the day before Halloween. I picked her up and she complained all the way home. I told her we just want you to get help, but of course, she was mad. She had to see her probation officer, she had missed her appointment, so she was scared of being violated and going back to jail. That’s another whole story in itself. She was charged with waving and pointing a pellet gun at several officers, got tazed and thrown in jail, all while on those “new meds” from the week before at this same rehab! You just can’t make this stuff up. So, no job, addicted to Xanax, living at home at the age of 37, watching Mom and Dad raise her 9 year old son. This cycle went on for years. Leaving home to move in with “a friend” every few weeks, coming home staggering, passing out, dropping pills everywhere, it was just insane... all with a little boy watching... just so sad.

So that next day came, Halloween. I took her to probation where that really set her off. She was threatened with getting violated if she didn’t have a job, and she said to me, “I WON’T go back to jail, I’ll KILL myself first.” We took her son trick or treating at our church for about an hour and a half. Stacy came with us. We came home, and her son wanted to get candy from two neighbors that had saved him some. Stacy said, “I’m not going” and went into the house while we walked two houses away. As we walked past our house, we heard what we thought was a very loud firework. Thinking it is Halloween, no big deal, we went a few doors away and picked up a little more candy and walked home. We were only gone for probably 20 – 25 minutes.

We went into the house and Tyler, Stacy's son, immediately starts looking for his mom. She was always packing up and leaving so I'm sure he was wondering if she had called another friend and left. He goes towards her bedroom, which is right across from his. She wasn't there. Looks in his room, calling out to her, "mom, where are you?" She's not in their bathroom either. My craft/bedroom is on the other side of the house, next to another bathroom. The house is a little dark and as we start turning on lights, I see my bathroom light on. Odd... we are all now calling out her name but hear nothing. She had passed out the night before at around 2am, from who knows what, so I'm saying to my husband, "Maybe she's passed out again?" We all head into my bathroom and try to open the door. It's not locked but we are having a hard time opening it. I'm starting to get scared and say to hubby, "Push hard, I think she's passed out on the floor." As we push open the door, with my 9-year-old grandson right there, we see her lying on the floor, and we see some blood around her head. I'm yelling, "Her head is bleeding." At this point my husband sees MY gun laying across her stomach... it's not sinking in what we are ALL looking at... Hubby yells, "Get Tyler out of here," realizing she has shot herself!!! I pull my grandson out and call 911, still not really grasping what I'm seeing. The operator tells me to get everyone outside and wait for them. I hate that I listened to them, wishing I'd have stayed with her and talked to her...

I take Tyler outside and he is screaming at Satan, "I HATE YOU... YOU TOOK MY MOM!!!" This moment haunts me to this day, the look on that little boy's face, he kept asking me, "What did she do granny, did she shoot herself,

why granny, didn't I listen good enough?" This little guy has no dad, he was truly a miracle baby, through in vitro, who Mom devoted her life to, at least for the first 2 years until the damn Xanax took over.

It seemed like forever for the ambulance to get here. Tyler kept asking, "Why aren't they bringing her out and taking her to the hospital?" My neighbors took Tyler into their house, while we were questioned by the police. It just didn't seem real. Was I really saying those words, "She shot herself, with MY gun?" I really thought I was going to have a heart attack. I felt my heart breaking into pieces, not just for me, but for a 9-year-old little boy who just thought his mom was the best, even in her dark days of being drugged out of her mind, or during a manic episode. He never gave up hope that she would get better.

We have had majority custody of Tyler since he was 2, when Stacy started to get really bad. She always hated us for that, but I know she understood. She had written several letters through the years saying, "You all would be better off without me. Tyler will do just fine with you guys." No Stacy, we are NOT fine, not even close. Your choice (and I struggle with the anger, was it her or did mental illness take her) took all hope that we had, waiting for the day that you'd get clean, stay clean and get the right combo of psych meds so you could eventually live on your own with your son... it was her dream but so many things got in the way. Just heart breaking, because she loved that little boy with all her heart and soul.

Now, a year later, we are still in grief counseling. Tyler still thinks he's partly to blame, still hopes she will walk

through the door from another rehab and life will be great. I go over and over, almost daily, what could I have done different. Could I have said more, tried another rehab, another mental facility. It will stay with me until I'm gone. Love never stops for your kids and I think the more you love them, the harder the grief... I just don't know. It's a pain I wouldn't wish on anyone.

It's very strange, but I know it's Stacy. She seems to try to let us know she's around because a few of her favorite songs keep coming on the radio, especially when we pick up Tyler at school. She was about 9 years old when a Prince song came out that she loved, "Raspberry Beret". It's like she's keeping close to him, but oh how I wished she'd have stayed. No child should be without parents, but it's our new life now. Not what I'd have imagined, in retirement... going to soccer practice, judo classes, volunteering at school. I thought I'd be on a cruise ship somewhere at my age. But life has a funny way of turning things around. I'll be 71 when Tyler graduates.

We have been asked by several people, "How can you still live in your house, and go into your bathroom?" Oddly, I feel closest to Stacy there. I usually talk to her, seems that's where I find a little peace. So, parents, be nosey, be firm, loving, yet persistent, snoop, and be the best damn detective you can be. It just may save your child's life.

Bobby Phipps

October 24, 1980 – September 7, 2015

Written by: Jeanne Harris, Bobby's mother

The doctor said, "It's a boy!" My Bobby! I knew when I was about 16 that if I ever had a boy, his name would be Bobby. When his father came to the hospital he was holding a large bouquet of roses and said, "I am so happy for you." I replied, "You mean for us." I knew then that Bobby would be my full responsibility. He was the happiest baby I ever saw. He was so chubby, and those eyes would melt anybody's heart. When I would walk him in his stroller, strangers would say to me he's so pretty to be a boy! I beamed inside! I just knew he was going to be somebody one day.

Bobby grew up playing baseball for eight years. He loved the game and had the highest stats than any of his teammates. High school was where Bobby found the love of his life, Jenn. A beautiful cheerleader and honor student. They were together for about four years. Jenn became pregnant in their senior year. The outcome was an abortion. The relationship fizzled soon after that.

Bobby worked for BP Oil Co. for about five years when he was fired for selling steroids. This was the beginning of the end for him. He moved back home and suffered from depression. He would never be able to keep a job again. He worked at an Italian restaurant (I will decline to give the name). This is an addict's paradise! I would say at least 50% of the employees used every type of drug there was. Bobby was no exception. Coke, crack, heroin, pills. Candy Land on Belair Road.

I was living with my current husband in Joppa and decided to stop by my house in Parkville. Oh, God, why did I do that? There were about 15 people from the restaurant there just smoking their crack and drinking. I threw everyone out and was furious with Bobby for using my house for a crack party.

My relationship with my son changed that night. I could never believe anything he said. He lied to me so much. He would come over on Christmas high as a kite. He would never admit to it, but anybody over the age of 5 could see it. I loved Bobby as much as any mother loved their child. I was very ignorant when it came to drugs. I never went down that avenue. I just didn't know what to do. He was a grown man at this time. I could not take him by the hand and take him someplace to get help. He had to want help, which he did not.

I overheard a co-worker telling someone, "I'll take you to see Dr. Wright. He runs a drug and alcohol program. He can help you." Bobby got in an accident when he was under the influence. Got locked up and was facing jail. I went to my co-worker and asked if Dr. Wright could help my son battle his addiction. He said, "I'll call him." He did. We set a day and time up with Dr. Wright for Bobby to be evaluated. Bobby did not want me to know the results of the evaluation! That was fine. I just wanted him to stop. Every Thursday evening, I would go with Bobby to the Alpha Program. I needed education too. Bobby wanted help. He had had enough. Five weeks later, I lost my precious son to a heroin overdose. He had been clean for 5 weeks.

Life as I knew it is over. I cannot come to terms with never seeing or touching my son again. I cannot accept he is gone from my life. I will live with a broken heart until the day I die.

CHAPTER 6

YOUR JOURNEY TO HEALING

COPING WITH DEATH

No one ever said life was fair. If anyone knows that it's you. I'm sure you've been saying things like, "I will never be the same," and you won't be. "My life has changed forever," and you are right. "Why has this happened to me?" I can't tell you why, but it has happened and neither you nor I can change that. Today you are consumed with grief. Your joy and happiness have been replaced with sadness and despair. And in your heart things will never be the same. Grief is your new companion. It will be so bad at times that you will think, "I am never going to make it through this day." But, somehow you do survive the day only to wake up the next day with the same feeling that is now tucked away deep inside your heart. The following day, and the day after that, and even the day after that; the feeling never goes away. It is with you always.

Everyone has their own way of dealing with the loss of their loved one. Some deal with it openly while others try to hide their sorrow. Some coping methods are constructive

while others can be destructive. Let's first talk about some things that can be destructive.

Tranquilizers may help for a while, but should you keep taking them? NO! Drinking alcohol or using drugs will not help. That will just create more problems for you. And when morning arrives your sadness will be right there waiting for you.

Cursing will not help. That will just be more frustrating. Snapping at your friends will not help. All they will do is stay away. Then you have no one to talk to. Holding things in will not help. This could only cause sickness and you need to be focused from now on. Trying to forget will not help. And why would you want to forget a loved one? Being brave all the time will not help. This is your loss to deal with. Being strong for everyone else does not help. Everyone must face this death sooner or later. You can only do so much. Blaming yourself will not help. Blaming others will not help. And blaming God will not help. Dwelling on the past will not help. Dwelling on things you did or did not do will not help. You cannot change anything that has happened. Not moving on with your life will not help. You cannot stay in the shadows of yesterday. I did not say stop loving! But you must try and move on. What would your loved one tell you to do?

WHERE TO FIND THE HELP YOU SO DESPERATELY NEED

*Have mercy upon me, O' Lord, for I am in trouble:
mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my
belly.* (Psalm 31:9).

So how do you handle this intense pain? Support is key. Although you can never bring your loved one back, you can survive this horrible catastrophe that has taken its toll on your life. But, it will take time; lots of time, lots of tears and lots of grief. But, life will go on. Without your soul mate, your sibling, mother, father, daughter or son. It has been a long road; a tough road. And now you are at the crossroads of life. One road leads to doing what you have been doing since your loved one passed away. The other road just means you are moving on with life, still loving, still caring, and yes, still grieving.

You may want to try some new things like playing golf, or painting, or taking up a new hobby. You may want to even work a part time job. Or do some volunteer work. You may want to call some old friends and make arrangements to get together with them. I am listing a few things that may help you to cope with some of the pain.

FRIENDS AT A TIME OF DEATH

What would we do without our friends? God puts friends in our lives for many reasons. Some friends can bring comfort by praying and using scriptures. And quite frankly, some friends can get on your nerves. Did you ever read the story

of The Secret Life of Walter Mitty? He would pull his ear every time he wanted his wife to disappear. Why? She would get on his nerves. Some of these people may be getting on your nerves. So, you may want to try pulling on your ear or trying another coping mechanism before you say something you may later regret. I find that to be a lot of help for me when I do not want to be around certain people. Others may not know what to say or do in a situation like this. And I have found that some friends will say things without thinking. Here are some common things that people say:

- “How are you doing?” And you will think, “Really? How do you think I’m doing?”
- “How do you feel?” You will think, “Really? How do you think I feel? I feel like yelling, crying, running away. I feel mad, hurt and alone. That is how I feel.”
- “At least you have other children.” And you will think “WHAT did you just say? As if that makes any difference!”
- “You’re doing well.” You’re thinking, “Are you kidding me? I’m glad you think so, but I am not. Not now and not later.”
- “I hope you liked the flowers.” You will be thinking, “Yes, but I wish someone else would have gotten them.”
- “God must have wanted it this way.” You will be thinking, “Do not talk to me about God right now. I am mad at God.”

- “Our prayers will be with you.” You will be thinking, “Thank you, but what good is that going to do now?”

Your friends are just trying to help you. Remember, you did the same thing when one of their loved ones passed away. You said some of the same things. All of these people are saying to you, “We are here for you.” We are all afraid of the things that we do not understand. So we sometimes think of words to say. Or maybe you have a friend who doesn’t know what to say. And that’s okay too. That does not mean that they do not care. Sometimes, just having someone around not giving you any advice, but just being with you, is the best thing you can ask for.

And then there are the friends that think they know what’s best for you and want to run things for you. If you need help during this difficult time, and I am sure you will, I would suggest that you ask someone to help you take care of things. Tell them what you need, and they can handle it for you. You can ask people to answer phone calls, go to the store for you or pick up people from the airport, if needed. And if you feel like being alone, you can ask them to leave.

Just try to remember, your friends are only trying to help, and they will most likely be coming around again. There will be many difficult days ahead. But, this is your cross to bear. It belongs to you and you alone. This is your pain and your hurt and you must face it. You must do it any way that you can; no matter who likes it.

I FEEL LIKE CRYING

Crying is letting grief out and you have to let it out or it will consume you. Sometimes pent-up emotions can lead to destructive behaviors such as fighting, drinking alcohol, using drugs, staying angry or withdrawing from life. And we all know that is not good.

People will say you must be strong. What they are really saying is, "I am uncomfortable when you cry."

Sure, your friends may be uncomfortable when you cry, but they will understand. You do not need to be strong for anyone! And you don't need anyone's permission. You are hurting inside so let it out. Now may be a good time to cry. Later is also a good time to cry. Some people will cry hysterically. Some cry a long time. Others cry and then stop only to start again. There is no time limit on how long one can cry. Tears will come and go. They may come when you hear a song. They may come when you see someone that looks like your loved one. Rest assured the tears will come back; in a week, a month, a year, or in ten years. Even if you live to be one hundred, the tears will come back.

Somewhere it is written that men don't cry. I am six-foot four and I weigh 240 lbs. I worked undercover narcotics for the Baltimore City Police Department. I remember to this day how I cried when my car partner and best friend was shot and killed. It was July 26, 1972. His name is Lorenzo Gray. He was an honest police officer; a man that you could count on. Officer Gray had the respect of everyone in our unit. Things could have been different on that July night. You see, Officer Gray and I were working together. One night he would drive, the next night I would drive. I

don't remember exactly how it happened, but he and I had a discussion as to who was going to drive and who was going to write reports. So, we tossed a coin. The loser would write the reports and the winner would drive. I won the toss. We wanted to get a cup of coffee before we started taking care of more important matters. So we decided to drop him off at the Holiday Inn to get the coffee and I would deliver a paycheck to an officer who was off. It was only a few moments after I left Officer Gray that a chilling call came from the police dispatcher. "Officer down...signal thirteen...Holiday Inn Orleans Street." It was Officer Gray. A man was waiting behind the door at the Holiday Inn with a shotgun. As Officer Gray walked in for the coffee, the man came from behind the door. He pushed the shotgun to Officer Gray's chest and pulled the trigger. I remember running inside the hotel. I saw my friend lying in a pool of blood. As I placed my hand behind his head a tear came from his eye. I think I went into shock. Everything happened so quickly. I remember our regular sergeant was off that night. I tried to call him right after the ambulance took Officer Gray to the hospital, but I could not remember his number. I was so upset that I had forgotten where the hospital was, and I had been there a thousand times before. All I remember is that I was in the police car and I had the siren on, but I did not know where I was. Officer Gray had died on that summer night and all I can remember is how I cried for the next few weeks. It has been forty-five years and it still hurts. So, for me, it's okay for men to cry.

When Jesus died on the cross, many of his friends cried. I'm sure they felt the same pain you feel right now: lost, empty, sad and very upset. So go with your feelings and cry

whenever you need to. If your family or friends are uncomfortable with your tears, then they can leave.

TALKING ABOUT DEATH

I have found that many people will never bring up your loved one's name; that is unless you bring it up first. The reason is simple; they do not want to upset you. So, you need to tell everyone that it is okay to talk about the person who has died. If you do not feel like talking, tell them. If you want to talk about your loved one, then talk about them. If you want to cry, then cry. If you want to yell, then yell. Do whatever it takes; just don't hold in the pain. You have to let the sadness out.

Any time is a good time to talk if you're feeling up to it. You still can't believe what has happened. The shock will leave but the sadness remains today, next week, next month and all of the years that follow. So, talk about whatever is on your mind. Talking helps with the grief process. Some people may think you don't want to talk about the things that have happened. But you may want to! And that's what you should do. Put your feelings into words. If you're angry about something, then let it out. Say, "I am really angry, or 'I am really sad, or 'I am really hurting." Say it softly. Say it loudly. Scream if it will help you, just let it out.

A word of caution ... some people may feel you are not moving on with your life. They may not want to hear any more about the funeral or the events surrounding your loved one's death. So, you may want to find a support group or grief counselor that will always be there for you.

Some people may not know how to express their feelings out loud. Expressing your grief in the form of writing is also very helpful. You may want to get a journal and just start writing down what you're feeling. Write down memories of your loved one. You could even put some photos of your loved one in the journal after the memory you write down. Drawing pictures or painting is also a good way to express your feelings.

GRIEF COUNSELING

Everyone has questions, and everyone needs answers. I have taught death and dying classes in the past and what works for some people will not work for others. Grief counseling and special groups that deal with the loss of loved ones can help. But nothing will work until you're ready.

Your Pastor certainly has knowledge on the subject of death. He or she can provide you with spiritual guidance and counseling at the same time. You must do whatever it takes to make it through the day. Express whatever is on your mind. And remember, hold nothing in.

In one of my grief counseling meetings I asked my clients to bring in something personal about their loved one. One person brought a baseball glove; one brought a hairbrush; one, a family photograph; another brought a driver's license; and one brought an old coat. It was emotional but also very helpful. Each of the items had special meaning and each person told a story about what they brought. This was not as bad as one may think. Some of the clients

laughed as they told their story. Some cried as they told their story. But when one cried, I could see the others placing their hand on that person's shoulder or on their hand. And for the first time, the person who had been grieving was now consoling another in their grief.

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. (2 Corinthians 1:3-6, NIV).

MARRIAGE COUNSELING

Many times, the death of a child will place a tremendous strain on a marriage. One parent may feel like the other parent is not showing enough emotions. One may feel that the other is not moving on like they should. Spouses may even feel hate towards each other at times. Other problems, such as lack of intimacy may also lead to the collapse of a marriage. Feelings of loneliness and guilt could last for years. Communication often breaks down and marital separation may take place. It is wise to seek help from a counselor as soon as possible if you feel these problems are disrupting your marriage.

FINDING COMFORT THROUGH GOD

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4).

You may try and go this sorrow alone. However, there is help. Not from friends or from family. But from God!

God is omnipresent, simply meaning that God is always present. He is always there for you.

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:7-13, NIV).

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. (Joshua 1:9).

God is omnipotent, meaning God is all power. God can do the impossible, things that no man can do. Remember, He made heaven and earth.

My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:2).

And he said, the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. (Luke 18:27).

And God is omniscient, meaning that God is all knowing. He understands. He knows your sorrow. He knows your pain. And He is there to help you. Talk to God about how you are feeling. Let Him comfort you. Let God be your strength when you are weak. Lean on Him and allow Him to provide the comfort you so desperately need. He knows your grief so take your time.

⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

⁷Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7).

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:13).

HAVING HOPE THROUGH FAITH

When things are going well, it seems people don't need faith. When there is sickness or death we sometimes find it hard to trust God. But, no matter how bad things seem, there is some purpose in everything that happens that will ultimately bring forth greater good.

⁴One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my

life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. ⁵For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. (Psalm 27:4-5, NIV).

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? (Romans 8:24).

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Trust is part of faith and faith will see you through this difficult time. Faith is trusting in God, even when we do not understand His plan. We think we know what is best for us, but God assures us that He has bigger and better things in store for us. We just have to believe.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19, NIV).

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9).

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (Psalm 91:2).

PRAYER

Prayer is how we communicate with God. So go to God in prayer. Pray about how you feel. Seek out your answers and He will provide peace. Just talk to God. Even if you don't know what to say, that's okay. He will lead you through. For when you call upon the Lord, He shall hear your prayers. But you must first ask for His help, otherwise He will not hear you.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-9).

I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me. (Psalm 77:1).

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27).

⁹ And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. ¹⁰ For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Luke 11:9-10).

That last verse may have you questioning your faith at times; especially when you experience a loss. So often we ask yet we do not receive. We have searched yet we have not found our answers. We have knocked so hard that our knuckles are bleeding. Why then does it *seem like* our prayers have gone unanswered? I believe that often times we do not make requests of God, but we demand things from Him. We forget that we are not in control. We think we make plans but are those plans in accordance with God's ultimate purpose for our lives? God always answers, in His own time. We must learn to be patient and listen for the answer that He gives. No answer is still an answer. Maybe our faith is being tested further. And sometimes, whether we like it or not, the answer is no. But when we stop praying that is when God can no longer hear us.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12, NIV).

¹⁴Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.¹⁵He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. (Psalm 91:14-15).

Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. (Micah 7:7).

I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 17:6, NIV).

²And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. ³Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Luke 11:2-4).

CHAPTER 7

STRANGE EVENTS, ANGELS AND PSYCHICS

Just when you think you're getting through the day, it will happen. Call it a message, call it a visit or call it whatever you like. There will be times when you feel your loved one has returned, and it will stop you in your tracks. You may think you saw them in the crowded mall. You may have only gotten a glance, but you are certain it was them. You may smell their favorite perfume or cologne and just know they were there. Without warning, you may hear their voice as plain as day saying, "Hello." You may hear them singing along to the radio when their favorite song comes on. It's as if they are right there with you. Sometimes strange things happen. A door may shut, a light may flicker, or a soft breeze may seem to come out of nowhere causing goose bumps on your skin. You will be certain it is them.

IT SMELLS LIKE RAIN

A local radio station was trying to raise money for the Johns Hopkins Cancer Unit located in Baltimore,

Maryland. Throughout the day people told stories of children who died or were dying of cancer. Here is one of the many stories told on that day.

A little five-year-old girl had cancer. It was so bad that she could not be held by anyone because of the pain she suffered when being touched. Her little bed doubled as a stroller. On certain days her mother would take her to see her brother play baseball. One day as the family was attending a baseball game, the little girl said to her mother, "Smell that Mom?" The mother said, "Yes, it smells like rain." A few moments later the little girl said again, "Can you smell that Mom?" The mother replied, "Yes, it smells like rain. I guess we should go." The little girl then said, "No, Mom it's not rain. That smell is what it smells like when Jesus holds you in his arms."

Sadly, the day after that conversation with the little girl and her mother, the little girl passed away. Did the little girl know something we don't know?

THE RAINBOW

Do you believe God can send us a message? When a friend of mine died I was asked to say a few words at his funeral. I tried to console the family and I told them that if there was no rain in our lives we would never have rainbows. After the service, we were on the way to the cemetery when this sudden storm came. It rained for only a few moments and then the sun came out. As we pulled into the cemetery and walked up to the grave there was the smell of freshness

in the air. Someone pointed toward the sky and there was this beautiful rainbow just above the grave. Was it God telling the family that everything would be alright? I don't know, but the family members will never forget the day the rainbow appeared.

ANGELS

There are many stories that tell us about Angels. Many of them are found in the Bible. If you believe in Angels, then you must believe in God. And if you believe in God then you know that He is the creator of all things.

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. (Colossians 1:16).

Angels are distinct spirit beings created by God. They were created to worship God and to perform various duties for Him. Let's take a look at some of those duties.

Angels are commanded to bless and praise the Lord

Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. (Psalm 103:20).

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. (Psalm 148:2, NIV).

Angels are sent to earth to serve humans

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14, NIV).

Angels serve as messengers for God. They can provide comfort and encouragement.

⁵And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. ⁶He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. (Matthew 28:5-6).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John. (Revelation 1:1a).

²³For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, ²⁴Saying, Fear not, Paul... (Acts 27:23-24).

Angels are sent to earth to protect us from harm

⁹Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; ¹⁰There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. ¹¹For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (Psalm 91:9-11).

⁶This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. (Psalm 34:6-7).

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. (Daniel 6:22).

Angels can serve as spirit chaperons for those who die in Christ

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. (Luke 16:22a).

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:31).

Do we become Angels when we die?

Not according to the Bible. We know that when we die in Christ, we receive new glorious bodies like angels, but we do not become angels. We are separate beings.

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:36).

For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (Matthew 22:30).

I'd like for you to read this story that comes from a grieving mother who lost her daughter Dawn.

My daughter Dawn was such a good person. I miss her so much. There is not a day that goes by that I do not think about her. Some of you may not believe what you are about to hear. Others may have an explanation for what happened on that day in the supermarket. Dawn was taken from me in a horrible traffic accident. Every day I would visit her grave and talk to her. I wanted to know if she was at peace. Then one day in the supermarket, a young lady about Dawn's age walked up to me. She did not look like my daughter, but her eyes were identical to Dawn's. The young lady had no grocery cart. She held nothing in her hands to even indicate that she was shopping. She walked up to me and said, "There you are. I just wanted you to know that I found Jesus and I am at peace." She then walked away. I was confused about the young lady's words. Was she someone I met at church? I tried to find her, but it was like she disappeared. I went up and down

every aisle in the store. But the young lady that had the eyes of my daughter had vanished. Later that day I was thinking about my Dawn. She is always on my mind. No one knows how much I miss her. Was she at peace? Then it came to me. Could it be possible? Did Dawn send me a message? Who was that young lady in the supermarket? Was she sent from God? Did God send an Angel to me on that day? I don't know. But I do know that young lady had my Dawn's eyes. And I also know she had no groceries. And when I tried to find her she was gone. And there is one other thing I want to say. I feel now my Dawn is at peace. And no matter what anyone says, I believe that young lady in the supermarket was sent to me on that day.

Could it have been an angel that day at the supermarket? If Angels are messengers created by and sent by God and a person prays, I believe God will send the answer. Remember, Angels are sent to provide comfort and encouragement.

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:2).

Some years ago, there was a story told on National Television. It was a story of a little girl who was playing on the back of her father's car. The story was reported that a father came out of his house and he gets into his car and drives to the store. What he does not know is that his little girl is holding on to the back bumper of the automobile. As he drives on the beltway his speed is about 70mph. The little girl is still holding on to the bumper. In this report, the witnesses say they did everything to get the father's

attention. Then, he finally stops his car. When he found that his daughter was holding on to the back bumper, he became overwhelmed with guilt and happiness. His daughter was not hurt. The reporter then asked the little girl, "Were you afraid?" The little girl replied, "No, a man was holding onto me." No one saw the man, only the little girl. Some say it was an Angel. What do you think?

I will end the topic of Angels with a story of my own. At the time, I was still a police officer for the Baltimore City Police Department. It was about 2am on a Sunday. I was sitting in my police car going over my sermon notes for my very first sermon that was to be preached during brotherhood week. A car pulled out of the parking lot I was sitting in, and the driver started spinning the tires on his car. I reacted quickly, fastening my seat belt and turning on my lights and sirens. Before I knew it I was involved in a car chase. We traveled up one street and down another, picking up speed as we went. He was passing other vehicles and I was right behind him. All of a sudden, a car pulled out from a side street. I tried to apply my breaks however, the police vehicle was equipped with steel studs embedded into the tires and it was like I was sliding on ice. Before I knew it, my police vehicle collided with the car that pulled out from the side street. The next thing I remember I was laying on the street. I was going in and out of consciousness. I saw a large pool of blood flowing from above my head. I knew my injuries were serious because I heard the ambulance dispatcher say that he was taking me to Johns Hopkins Hospital. They only took injured police to that hospital if the injuries required them to do so. Back then, police and firefighters were always sent to Mercy Hospital. About ten months into my recovery, my old

friend from the department came for a visit. He had some pictures of the accident and thought I may be ready to look at them. As I opened the envelope, a lump formed in my throat. I could feel the pain of the accident all over again. Then something on the driver's side caught my eye. The steering wheel was pressed all the way back up against the back of the driver's seat. How was it that I was not killed? I knew my seatbelt was on but then I remembered just before the accident I dove over to the passenger side. Or did I? Then I felt this warm feeling come over me. No! There was no way. But there was only one answer. Either I unfastened my seatbelt before the accident or someone or something did it for me. And I knew I did not unfasten it because I did not have the time to do so. So that meant it was done by someone else. And that someone had to have been God! This particular accident also ended my career as a police officer. God was leading me on a different path.

PSYCHICS

Many people have opinions about psychics or mediums. The pain they are feeling after their loss is so unbearable that some people may choose to visit a psychic in the hopes of speaking to their loved one again. Or maybe they just want to try to find out where their loved one is and if they are okay. Now, it is true that mediums are mentioned and used in the Bible.

Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." (1 Samuel 28:7, NIV).

However, if you are a Christian, I would not expect the church, as a whole, to approve of you seeing a psychic. They are generally not accepted as a way to have your questions answered about death. This is what the scriptures say.

“Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:31, NIV).

When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? (Isaiah 8:19, NIV).

For the record, I had a friend who says he was psychic. I really didn't know him as a good friend but more of an acquaintance. One day he was visiting, and I showed him my race car (project that caught the eye of many young people who I let work on the car to keep them off the streets). He knew nothing about race cars. He was never in my garage before nor did he ever see this car before.

As he walked around the car he stopped and said, “You have a problem with the wheel on this side. Something is broken.” I assured him that the vet was fine and that there was no problem with the wheel. Again, he said I should get it checked before driving it.

The next day, I had the car on the trailer and thought I would pick up gas and see if another friend of mine, who worked on cars, could pull the wheel from the back to check it. He asked if I was having problems with the car. I explained the situation and what this proclaimed psychic

told me and we both laughed. He pulled the wheel off and his face automatically told me something was wrong. He said, "This is a joke, right?" I looked, and he showed me a part that would have never been detected unless the wheel was taken off the car.

Do I believe in psychics? Well, if I would not have had the car checked it would have crashed because the broken part was on the brakes. The car did a quarter mile in 10 seconds. I also know psychics have been used to solve crimes in some cases.

So, in the grieving person's opinion, seeing a psychic may help. If you do choose to see a psychic, please use caution. Please remember that no one can bring your loved one back to you. My advice to you would be to never give any personal information to them. If you go to a church, talk with your pastor. If not, talk to a counselor, family member or close friend.

CHAPTER 8

KEEPING YOUR LOVED ONE'S MEMORY ALIVE

It has been many years since I heard an old minister say these words. He may have been reading them out of a book or he could have just made them up to comfort a family. I don't know. I have forgotten most of his words, so I have called this "Only Roses Say Goodbye."

God sees our families as rose gardens. When a child dies, it has been said that God has taken the rose that hasn't blossomed yet for his bouquet in Heaven. And when a young person dies, it has been said that God has taken a rose that has just started to blossom, and he places this rose in his bouquet in Heaven. It is only when the elderly die, that the bouquet of flowers in Heaven are complete. With this thought, one can truly say, "Roses never die." And neither does your loved one! They are always there, alive in your memory!

REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONE

A memory, as defined in The Merriam-Webster Dictionary is, “The time within which past events can be or are remembered.” A memory starts the moment a person enters into our lives. All of us leave behind memories for family and friends after we die. I always tell people that if God will let me, I would like to help with the sunsets. Most all of my friends know how much I enjoy a beautiful sunset. When I die many of them will remember me when they see the evening sun going down.

Loved ones need to be remembered. And as long as you remember, they are still alive in your memories. The only thing that is over is the funeral. Your relationship with your loved one will never be over. They were part of your life and you will never forget them. And why would you want to?

There is today and there can be a tomorrow. There was also a yesterday. And yesterday was a memory. In the memory of yesterday you will find things that will bring you pain and you will find things that will bring you joy. Memories of the days gone by such as: pictures, letters and cards that you held on to. Some you placed on a shelf; others have been placed in your heart by the one you love. If they were important yesterday, should they not be more important today? Because yesterday your love was with you; today they have gone. Yes, it will hurt when you read that card from yesterday because it has a special meaning now. You will cry when you hold their picture because you remember how much you love them. The past is like your shadows; they will always be there. But late in the evening, our

shadows leave us. Remembering is just the beginning of a new world for you. Some memories will bring you pain; others may bring a smile. What memories have been left for you?

TREASURE CHEST OF MEMORIES

Think for a moment about the things your loved one said or the way they dressed. Maybe it's how they lived their lives. What about their music. Remember when you would say, "Turn down that music!?" Now you want to listen to it all day long. And let's not forget all the times they were always early for the family outing, or when they always came two hours late. They always had some excuse. What about the first time you held them in your arms? I counted fingers and toes. But as a parent, I guess you did too. I was so afraid they were going to break they were so small. Then there was the first day of school. You probably cried more than they did. Before you knew it, school was over but the memories are still there. You need to look into the treasure chest of memories; for in that chest you just may find the peace you have been looking for. Maybe others will open the chest for you. By the way they look, or by the way they dress. Maybe a smell from the kitchen or the fragrance of cologne will bring back a memory. You may hear or see a fire truck, or a police car and the chest will be opened.

But be prepared, memories do bring sadness. Sometimes the memories make us cry. Other times we laugh. Memories are everywhere. The places you traveled and the things you did together. The clothes they wore and the smiles they gave. All memories are part of your life and waiting for you to use over and over again. So take time today and use a memory. Spend a moment and laugh or

take a moment to cry. Maybe you need to be alone just to think. I bet you could use a memory right about now. Maybe you can take a notebook and write down as many memories that come to you. So, let's look into the treasure chest of memories and see what your loved one has left for you.

- Remember the time you laughed so hard that you thought you would never stop.
- Remember the things you did together. Remember the fun and happy things.
- Remember what their favorite time of the year was.
- Remember their favorite song.
- Remember their favorite color.
- Remember their favorite place to visit.
- Remember their favorite thing to do.
- Remember their favorite book.
- Remember their favorite pet.
- Remember their favorite people.
- If you can, stay in contact with their friends. These people are hurting as well. Comfort each other.

A memory can get us through the saddest days of life. Think for a moment of something your loved one did or said that made you laugh. Take a moment and feel their presence around you. If it helps, you can hold their pillow or wear their favorite sweater or shirt. Some people even wear their loved ones favorite perfume or cologne. If that will provide comfort for you, then you should do it. If not, try something else. Now you know how the treasure chest of memories can help you. Use them whenever you need to. Be sure to have your box of tissues nearby because you will most likely need them as well. And that is okay.

HONORING YOUR LOVED ONE

There are so many things that you can do to honor your loved one. You can contact hospitals, high schools and churches; they all have a project they are working on and would be happy to talk to you. We have stained glass windows in our church donated by families whose loved ones have passed way. We have people donating money for headstones, so the grieving family does not have to worry about that expense. Sometimes Bible's or hymn books can be bought for a church in memory of your loved one. "This Book or Bible is in Memory of John Smith." Just keep in mind one step at a time. You can never bring your loved one back, but you can find a way in your grief to help someone else and to keep the name of your loved one alive. You could:

1. Start a Memorial Garden for your community. You can bury ashes of a loved one on church property. Check out our Memorial Garden on my website at: www.marylandduiclasses.com.
2. You can build a Memorial Prayer Garden in honor of your loved one. Check out the Bobby Phipps Prayer Garden at our church website at: www.merrittparkbaptistchurch.org.
3. You could start a college scholarship fund to honor your child.
4. You can get involved in creating new laws for your state by contacting your State Delegates. In Maryland, you can visit www.maryland.gov. In other states, just replace "Maryland" with the name of your state.

5. You can put up crosses of every person in your community that has died from drug or alcohol addiction. Over the Easter holiday, our church put 118 crosses on our property to remember the 118 students that I taught over the years that sadly lost their battle with drug or alcohol problems.

The next section will talk about some of the above-mentioned items and what we are doing at our church to remember those that we love so much.

MEMORIES AT MY CHURCH – MERRITT PARK BAPTIST CHURCH

The Tree of Remembrance

In addition to putting up a Christmas tree during the Christmas Season, our church also puts up a Tree of Remembrance. The tree is a way for people to remember anyone whom they have lost; they do not have to have been addicts. At first, some people in the church thought it was not a good idea. I remember one man complaining that it would do nothing but cause sadness for the families. But the tree went up. Guess what happened? When I asked people to bring in a Christmas ornament in memory of a loved one, the response was unbelievable. The tree has every kind of ornament you can think of: angels, match box cars, snowmen, fire trucks, small houses, teddy bears, and so many more. And remember the man who complained? Well, on Christmas Day many years ago, he came to the service. He walked slowly up to the Tree of Remembrance

and placed a toy truck on the tree and began to weep. There was a horrible accident and his grandson was killed over the summer. The Tree of Remembrance has been going up for about twenty years now. It is the first thing we put up each year.

Memorial Garden

After so many deaths in the community due to drug and alcohol abuse, our church decided to do something for the families of the addicted. Maryland law is very clear; you can bury cremains anywhere except on federal land. So, about six years ago, we created a Memorial Garden on our church property. The cremains of anyone who dies from addiction can be buried for free in our Memorial Garden.

We provide the grave plot, a service, flowers throughout the year and we even assist in purchasing a headstone if the family is indigent. Each headstone is alike in size and placed in such a way that every stone is the same height and width. We want everyone to be equal in our Memorial Garden. I will perform a free funeral service for the family, or the family can bring their own pastor and we will help set the service up.

People have asked, “What’s the catch? No one does anything for free.” There is no catch. There are no hidden costs, this program has no hidden agenda and church membership is not required. Any family who has suffered a loss of a family member due to drugs or alcohol addiction can request the cremains of their loved one to be buried in our Memorial Garden. How could anyone do this for free? My feeling is that when you take the money out of it people

will know where your heart really is. We were told that we could sell the plots for \$2,500 if we wanted to and that would be a bargain. We simply said, “No thanks, we are doing this for free.” We do not want the family to pay for anything. It’s got to be free because you cannot put a price on love. Roses and other flowers are planted around the garden continually. These flowers can be cut by family members at any time and placed on their loved one’s grave. Flowers are placed on every headstone during the holidays.

We got the church and the community behind us and the response has been unbelievable. Our program reaches out to many people. We encourage families to take an active part in their loved one’s celebration of life. Some will buy a headstone for a person who has died from drugs or alcohol; some will buy rose bushes in memory of a loved one; some will help cut the grass or work in the garden helping to keep our grounds beautiful; and some just come by to visit.

To my knowledge, our church is the first in the county to do what we are doing for the families of the addicted. The garden can be viewed on our church website at: www.merrittparkbaptistchurch.org or on my drug and alcohol education class website at www.marylandduiclasses.com. Just click on the section entitled “Memorial Garden.” If you would like more information about how you can start a Memorial Garden at your church, contact me and I will be happy to speak with you.

Bobby Phipps Prayer Garden

In 2017, the church put in the Bobby Phipps Prayer Garden in memory of one of my students, a young man named

Bobby Phipps, who died of a heroin overdose. People came from all over to make this peaceful place what it is today. Along with the free funeral services, a family can use the Bobby Phipps Prayer Garden to gather at any time of the year. However, permission must be granted by our Prayer Garden Director, Mrs. Jeanne Harris, Bobby's mother. You can view pictures of the Prayer Garden on our website: www.merriotparkbaptistchurch.org.

If you haven't yet read Bobby's story, written by his mother, Jeanne, please go back and read it under the chapter entitled, "In Loving Memory."

Trees on the Church Property

There is a row of tall pine trees that border our church property and a nearby stream. Each tree was planted in memory of someone very special. We also had a very faithful member named Mr. Douglas. After his death, the family planted a Douglas fir tree in front of the church. Today it still stands tall and is a memory of our friend who will never be forgotten.

Crosses for addicts who have died

Over the Easter holiday, we placed crosses on our church property in remembrance of loved ones who have died as a result of drugs or alcohol. One hundred eighteen of the crosses were in memory of the students that I taught over the years. I met with each of those families and performed their loved ones' services. I have officiated several hundred other funerals for addicts that I did not know. We hope that the crosses will bring attention to the loss of so many young lives; and awareness for the need of affordable, if not free, treatment programs.

Scholarships

If you can afford it, you can provide a yearly scholarship to any school of your choice. Just call the school and speak to the school principal for details. What our church did was give scholarships to students that were going into the field of substance abuse. Sometimes we gave the scholarship to a person going into the same trade of the person that the scholarship was honoring, for example, electricians' school or carpenters school. The scholarship recipients would be able to buy books or tools that they would need. The amount of the scholarship can be for as much as you like.

CHAPTER 9

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where is my Loved One? Is she/he in Heaven?

Remember in the beginning of the book that I said that a new life begins for both you and the deceased? We talked about how your life has changed since the passing of your loved one. Now, let me try to answer the two questions that by far, are the most commonly asked questions when a loved one passes. “Where are they?” And, “Are they in heaven?” These are good questions and no man can truly answer them without using the scriptures. So let’s take a look at some of those scripture verses that tells us the answers.

And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7, NIV).

God never said that we would live in our human bodies forever. However, he did promise us eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ. The Christian believes that when he or she dies they go to heaven. Heaven is a real place and you

must believe that. But what happens after you die depends on what happens while you are still alive.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2).

If your loved one accepted Christ, no matter what they did in this life, God has forgiven them for it.

My mother and step-father did not live a Christian lifestyle. My mother says she was a Christian, but she did not live the life of a Christian. However, I did speak to her about her salvation weeks before she started losing her memory. At the time of her death, I believe her heart was right with God. I believe that she was a 'whosoever.' My step dad was a very aggressive person when he would drink. There were times when he would be abusive to all of us. After he was diagnosed with cancer, I witnessed to him and I did see a change in him as time went on. I believe that he too was a 'whosoever.' Now think about your family for a moment. Maybe you are the only Christian in the family or maybe everyone has made a profession of faith. That means all of you are also the whosoever.

However, we do not know if a person is a Christian. We may think we know but did our loved one have time to make that decision? We simply don't know, and we have no control over God's record books.

⁹ However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"- the things God has prepared for those who

love him ¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-11, NIV).

³⁹ And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. ⁴⁰ But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. ⁴² And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. ⁴³ And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:39-43).

And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15).

But, what we do know is that there is hope.

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8).

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. ² It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for

death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:1-2, NIV).

Why didn't the police investigate my child's death?

When a death occurs, and the person is not under the care of a doctor the body is taken to the state medical examiner. In most cases an autopsy is performed. It may be weeks before the complete report is ready. When you receive a copy of the death certificate (funeral director will give you as many copies as you need) it will provide you with important information. It will provide you with the cause of death. They may also use a method known as the NASH code. The NASH code provides additional information for you. Here is how this works.

N is for natural death,
A is for accidental death,
S is for suicide, and
H is for homicide

It is the medical examiner that determines the cause of death and decides if there has been a crime. Many times, the police officer's hands are tied because the official cause of death is not a homicide. It would be important to contact the medical examiner with your questions if the police do not investigate. You can also make an appointment to talk to someone at the medical examiner's office after you receive the officer's report.

The other reason for not investigating a death is that the officer taking the call from the dispatcher is only performing a routine investigation and making a report as

to what he or she finds at the location of the incident. Some photographs may be taken. Then the report is filed and given what is known as a complaint number, also called a CC number. You can request a copy of the officer's report. The report will give you basic information and should tell you if the report has gone to another department. Usually after the medical examiner's report is filed it will be at that point you may want to request any follow-up reports that were filed. They will be filed by the same CC number found on the officer's report.

Now for the bad news...if the death occurred because of drugs they most likely will not investigate the death. However, if there are signs of a struggle or if there are any indications that the death was not caused by drugs, the medical examiner is the person to call followed by calls to the officer who wrote the reports. You can even ask the officer if there were any follow-up reports.

Why did the hospital refuse my son's/daughters organs?

This is a very good question and it is very important to ask questions about the true condition of your loved one. Organ donors are needed all over the world. However, an addict for example, lives a lifestyle much different than the rest of the population. Because of the many uncertainties that surrounded their life or maybe the health conditions at the time of death, the organs may have been deemed unhealthy. Cancer patient's organs are generally not taken because of the severity of the illness. But, depending on the situation, your family may be asked to donate organs, so be prepared to answer when the question is presented. If there is a living will, you must inform the hospital staff. Just about every state has recognized some form of the living will. Without

a living will, this decision will now be yours to make. It will be very difficult but remember that someone else can live because you gave the gift of life. For more information about organ donation you can visit <https://organdonor.gov/about.html>.

Will my other children also have a drug problem?

It is my opinion that life is filled with choices. Positive people bring a positive attitude; negative people bring a negative attitude. When it comes to drugs one would think that one death in the family would be a wakeup call to others but that is not always the case. I know some families that have three children and all three have addiction problems.

In life, we also know that we have leaders and followers. Experimental use with drugs can be triggered by peer pressure. I would suggest you get to know your children's friends and ask a lot of questions. If you suspect something is wrong check it out. Look for signs in changes of behavior and any new friends that may have recently come into your child's life. Look for school grades to drop, staying out later than normal, or resisting rules that have been enforced for years. Check your child's savings account and look for missing property. Lost coats, head phones, cell phones or anything of value can be taken to pawn shops or sold on the street. Also, look for any missing prescription medication. If you take any prescription drugs, please keep it out of their reach. And just keep asking questions. If you suspect something or something just does not feel right, go with your feelings and further investigate the situation.

People tell me I go to the cemetery too much. Can someone give me advice?

How long have you been going? Let me guess. Every day since your loved one has died. That's okay. If it makes you feel better than do it. But why do you go? Let me guess why. Do you feel close to them? Do you feel that if you don't go maybe they will think you have stopped loving them? You know better than that and so does your loved one. The cemetery is quiet. And it is also cold at times. I remember a lady who lost her daughter in an automobile accident. In counseling, she told me that she went to sleep by the back gate of the cemetery her daughter was buried in. When I asked why she did that this was her response. "My daughter was afraid of thunder storms, so I just wanted to be nearby." Only if you have lost a child will you know this kind of pain.

I visit my mother's grave every week; sometimes two or three times a week. I say, "good morning", or "good night". I tell her what a beautiful day it is going to be or if we will be expecting snow. However; I cut the grass at the church and my mother is buried in the Memorial Garden. My thoughts are you need to do things that will help you. If going to the cemetery helps you then I feel you should go. At the cemetery ask yourself this question, "What is here for me?" Do you think your loved one is there? Or has their soul moved on? You have got to think about that because this is part of accepting a person's death. The day will come when you will not go to the cemetery.

Is it normal to keep my son's/daughter's room like they left it?

You have decided not to touch their room. Secretly you have played the game saying to yourself, “Soon they will be home” or, “Surely that is them calling.” But deep inside your heart you know the reality. They are not coming back. How much time will pass before you accept your loss? There is no set time for you to overcome your loss. It may not be for months or even years. Everything takes time. In time you will pull yourself together. In time you can say their name without crying. In time you will go into their room without spending the day. I know many families that have kept a room just like their children left it. It becomes a shrine and a way of saying, “I will never forget you.” Each person has their own way of dealing with things.

People want some of my son’s/daughter’s things but I don’t want to give them up. What do you recommend I do?

I really cannot advise you as to what you should do with your loved one’s belongings. Some people remove everything within weeks and give all the clothing to the Goodwill. I personally would not recommend moving that fast with this decision. When the time is right, and if you are going to part with personal things that belonged to your loved one, consider giving them to someone that will appreciate them.

I had a good friend who died, and I still miss her today. Her family gave me an old clock that belonged to her. The hands of the clock were set to 4:05pm, the time of her death. At the bottom of the clock is a small opening. Inside that opening was a hair roller. I laughed when I saw it and I thanked the family. I would always say, “Ms. Weaver, I’ll put your hair up for you,” then we would both laugh. This

gift would have meant nothing to anyone but me. That old clock had little value and the hair roller, why you could buy them in any dime store. But for me that gift was like having a priceless painting. I still have that gift and I am so grateful that the family thought of me. So, take your time when making decisions.

I will never forgive myself for asking my son/daughter to leave my home. Now I feel this deep guilt as if I let him/her down. Is this normal?

Guilt finds its way in the lives of parents who have addicted children and no matter how things end, guilt, grief, sadness and depression will always be present.

We all have had arguments with people we love. We have all said and done things that we are sorry for now. You most likely felt the guilt the day you asked them to leave. However, I have seen families in turmoil because of the way things were going at home. I felt so bad when I asked my son to leave but I had no choice. Either he had to go, or I had to leave just to find peace. I could not sleep; my nights were filled with “Where is he?” and “What have I done?” The only time I had peace was when my son went to jail and it was me that put him there. As crazy as that sounds, with all the confusion that was in my life, I finally had peace. I knew he was off the streets; he had a bed to sleep in and he was provided with three meals a day.

If you have read this book from the beginning, then you know that my son is still alive. And I will do whatever it takes to make sure he stays alive. But to be honest with you, my son will try and put me on a guilt trip. He tells me if he hadn’t been sent to prison he would have what other

people have. But I always tell him if he hadn't been put in prison he would have died years ago. I think there is enough guilt around for all of us to share if we decide to travel down that road. As a father I did all I could do. My responsibility was to keep him safe, to be there for him when he needed me and I did all of that. My son's life choices have taken years off of my own life. So, to the parent's that are asking this question, yes, your feelings of guilt are normal. I chose to be a parent and not my son's friend or his buddy. I was and am his father and I am not ashamed to say that.

I never see my husband crying after our child died. Can anyone tell me why?

We assume others should grieve in the same way we do, that if they don't then they don't care. Just because they are not crying in front of you, does not mean that they are not hurting. Just remember people will grieve differently. Go with your own feelings and respect yourself and others. I have not cried one time since my mother has passed away. Is that normal? Yes, because I did all I could for my mother while she was living. Does it hurt? Absolutely and it comes when I least expect it.

I remember when I was very young I was crying because my mother was sick, and I thought she was going to die and leave me alone. Looking back, I remember the pain I felt, even at that young age. It's odd how memories come back to us after someone passes away. I decided to take two weeks' vacation to finish this book. So, I went on a cruise to Barbados. Writing this book meant going back in my own life. Something that hit me out of nowhere and was totally unexpected was the sadness that came over me while I was walking by the shops on the ship. During the

week they have jewelry on sale and it makes great gifts, especially for a lady 90 years old (mom). I would always pick my mother up a few pieces of jewelry when I traveled. I guess working on this book and seeing the jewelry opened a memory of the last time I saw my mother wearing the jewelry I bought her. I remember her laying on her bed with all the jewelry I bought for her over the years. She would put the rings on her finger and tell me how pretty each of them were. The jewelry wasn't expensive just a small gift that meant a lot to my mother; and later in life, to me. But that memory brought tears to my eyes. It made me think about how much I would like to buy another ring for her and when I got home, like so many other times, I would put it on her finger.

I officiated my mother's funeral, as well as the funerals of my brother, my nephew, my father, my niece, and every family member that has died. I am always the one they call when someone dies. Just like I am called when a student dies or a friend or a member of the church dies. I have to fight back the tears when I do the funeral, but maybe before or after I will have my moment.

People grieve in many ways. Some turn to drinking to drown their sorrows. Others to overeating, visiting the cemetery every day and some live in the sorrows of the heart without crying or even saying a word. Just because a person does not cry does not mean the pain has stopped. My sister for example, will sometimes just stare into the sky as if she is having this private conversation with her son Harry who passed away at age 17. But there is nothing anyone can do but handle the pain the best way they know how.

Where have all my son's/daughter's friends gone?

This is a very good question. Oh, they have not forgotten your son or daughter. It's not that they don't care; it's just that some people do not know what to say when they see you. Maybe you could call them and ask them to come over for a visit one evening. Just don't get too upset if they decline. Young people are kind of funny about being around sadness. They tend to keep to themselves and I can assure you it is not that they have stopped loving you or your family. You are just not around when they have their moment.

What should I expect in the future?

The future now looks dim and hopeless. Every day will be like a home video with one exception... there is no fast forward. It feels like everything is moving in slow motion. Every day will be like a rerun and you will play it over and over again. I want to take the time to speak about flashbulb memory. This term is used in counseling when someone has experienced an event and they can tell you everything that happened in detail. It could be a surprise party, a news event or even a death.

Take a moment and think of some of the memories that you have like that. If I were counseling you about the death of your child you could tell me everything that occurred such as, where you were when you received the information, where the event occurred and all the steps that followed that have been burned in your mind.

Any death of a person close to you will be burned in your memory. I can remember like it was yesterday, many of the people I have buried from my class and the church. While

writing this book I had to put it away for bit because my flashbulb memory was running in high gear. I could feel the pain all over again. I could remember the tears from the families. Some memories I just can't get out of my mind. There was a couple in our church and they were going to have a baby on or about Christmas Day. Everything was fine. The doctor assured the parents this would be an easy birth. The couple had the baby's room decorated for the holiday season that was upon us and everyone was in a festive mood. The moment came. The mother went into labor. The father and the rest of the family were all at the hospital waiting to celebrate. It was the first child for the parents and the first grandchild for the grandparents. The baby was delivered, and everyone was in the holiday spirit. But then something happened. The baby simply stopped breathing. The doctors and nurses tried everything, but nothing worked; not even the prayers. The child simply passed away. I will never forget the look on the mother's face followed by her screams. If ever I questioned God, it was on that day. I had no answers for the parents, grandparents or anyone. I was at a complete loss.

So that's kind of what to expect, reruns of the event followed by lonely days and nights. Over time you will stop crying and people may think you're doing well. You may smile on occasions and even be pleasant to the people around you. But you will never get over the death of someone you love. You will just bide your time in silence, smile now and then and make everyone think you're okay. Don't get me wrong, healing can occur, but you will simply never be the same and your heart will never let you forget.

I am so mad with the hospital when they said I should think about turning off the machines that was keeping him/her alive.

It is very hard for a parent to agree to take a loved one off of life support. I was present when my sister had to make that decision. I told her to take some time to think about things and the hospital agreed that she didn't have to make the decision at that very moment. In my heart I knew my nephew was gone; but convincing my sister that her only son, Harry, was gone, would be very hard. We all knew what the outcome was going to be, but we held on until we had to let go. My sister was crying uncontrollably and there was nothing I could do but stay by her side. After meeting with the family, the decision was made. Life support would be turned off the next day. I can remember the sobbing from a family friend when told there was nothing else that could be done. The next day we gathered by Harry's bed side and everyone said their goodbyes. Then came the moment the nurse said, "It's time," and just like that my sister's son was gone. All that was left were the memories of 17 years. The hospital made some cards with Harry's hand prints on them to give to family and friends.

For the first time in my life I couldn't help my sister. There was nothing that I could say or do to make her feel any better. What she wanted, no man could give. She wanted her son back. I remember taking my sister on a cruise just to get her away for a while. The sadness followed her everywhere and there was nothing I could do. While we were out on one of the excursions riding along the country side, my sister did something that I thought was strange, but it wasn't. I saw her holding a picture of her son next to the window. She was telling him how pretty the ocean was

and explaining what her eyes were seeing. She said, “I wish you were here with me to see all of this. I miss you so much.”

I had no words to comfort my sister on that sunny day. In my heart I knew nothing else existed but the moment she was in. Not the trees, or the white sandy beach or the small huts we passed. It was just her and the memories of her only son that had passed away. The only thing I could do was just be there for her, as I try to be every day of my life.

If you haven't read Chapter 5 – In Loving Memory, please go back and read it. There you can read in my sister's own words how she is coping with the loss of her son, Harry.

CHAPTER 10

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FUNERAL

A man by the name of E. Sweeney said these words: “It was not what I said that helped, but that I went, and that by going showed I cared.”

No one is ever prepared for the death of a loved one. And when a child is involved it makes things much more difficult. However, there are things that must be taken care of by you or a family member. The following are things that you will need to do when preparing for a funeral. Remember to take charge of the situation. And also remember that you are going to need help.

The Cemetery

The cemetery... a place set aside to bury our loved ones; although, I have found it to be a place of business and high-priced salesmanship. In Maryland you will most likely be asked to go to the cemetery to sign some papers before a service or a grave opening takes place. I just want you to know, the owner of the cemetery lot will be required to do

this. Why can't a family member take care of this responsibility? Because the lot owner can agree to upgrades on vaults, markers and whatever else the salesman is selling. Don't get me wrong, the lot owner still signs a paper for the opening of the grave. However, that is a prelude to the big sales pitch that is about to come. Beware! They put friends and family through pure hell with their sales pitch. They want to make a person feel guilty because a marker is too small or not attractive to the eye. Do yourself a favor, if you are required to bring the lot owner to the cemetery before a grave is opened take the biggest, meanest, most ruthless and obnoxious person you know with you and turn him loose on the salesperson when he or she asks about buying upgrades. Now, before someone files a lawsuit let me say, many, but NOT ALL cemeteries practice this method. Also, did you know that if you have a funeral after 12 noon on a Saturday that the family will be billed for overtime? Be sure to ask plenty of questions.

When my mother was told by the salesperson at the cemetery about the cost to put my father's date of death on his marker I was outraged. I asked the salesperson, "To whom does the marker belong?" He replied, "Why it's your mother's." I advised my mother to sign the grave opening papers only. I then gave the salesperson a good tongue lashing, and we left. We then drove over to my father's grave. I removed the small bronze plate from the lower right-hand side of his marker where they record the date of death. I took that plate to an engraver and had my father's date of death put on it. Please understand it was not about the money. It was the principle behind it. We saved \$225 and to look at the bronze plate you could not tell if it was done by the cemetery or by the engraver we used.

Opening the Grave: There is always a fee for a grave to be opened. On average, this fee will run about \$1,000 or more. If you buy a cemetery lot after your loved one has died, the cemetery will charge you an additional fee called, “at need.”

THE FUNERAL HOME

Things will be happening so fast and there are many things that you will need to consider. Here are some things that you will need to decide about the funeral.

Clothing for the Viewing: Take everything: socks, undergarments, shirt, pants, dress, tie, a complete suit if you like. But remember, take the clothes your loved one liked to wear. If they never wore a suit, then do not go out and buy one. If they were always seen in blue jeans and a sweater, then that is what you want to take to the funeral home. There is no law that says you must dress up to be buried. And don’t worry about what people think. Do what you think is best. Think about your loved one and what they would have wanted.

Cemetery Papers: You will need a copy of the cemetery papers. This tells the funeral director who to call. If you do not have a cemetery lot the funeral director can provide you with names of nearby cemeteries that can help you.

Casket verses Vaults: The funeral director will take you and family members into what is called the selection room. Most funeral homes are honest, and they do care about people. Some though only want to make a sale. You may be told, “The casket you are looking at is cheaper than the

others.” Some caskets seal, others do not. Spend a little less on a casket and a little more on the vault if you are looking for protection from the elements. And remember, a cemetery liner is not a vault. Do not overspend and do ask lots of questions. If you find the funeral director to be pushy, let him or her know right away. You are in charge and you know what you want.

Embalming: Embalming is not necessary if you are having a one-day viewing. However, for health reasons, embalming is necessary for a two or three-day viewing. It is always necessary if the body is being transported over state lines. By law the funeral home can only charge you for what you use. So, if you only have a one-day viewing make sure that is what you are being charged for.

Cremation: There are no scriptures in the Bible showing that cremation is forbidden. On my recent trip to Rome, I traveled into the Catacombs and learned that many of the men were cremated while the women and children were placed in the Catacombs. If you have questions about cremation, it would be best to speak to your minister. In our church, many have selected cremation over burial because of the cost.

Spending: Remember, do not overspend. The last thing a person needs is an extra bill to pay. Just before you finish your business with the funeral director, they should provide you with an itemized bill for the funeral. Take your time and look over the bill. If money is a problem, ask yourself if there is any way you can reduce the expenses. Ask what the cost will be if you held the viewing at your church instead of at the funeral home. If you are using your church

for the viewing, make sure the funeral home deducts that from your cost. Ask what the difference in cost would be for one, two and three-day viewings. Also, why pay \$150 or more for a limousine if you cannot afford to? Tell the funeral home you will be using your own vehicles. Always ask questions and have it put in the contract.

Life Insurance Policies: You should try to find out how much life insurance, if any, is available before making any funeral arrangements. The last thing you need is a funeral debt. Keep in mind that no matter who the insurance policy is made out to, the person signing for the funeral is responsible for that payment. The policyholder is not required to use the money for the funeral.

Who will be speaking at the funeral: If you know a clergy, have someone call them. If you do not, the funeral home should have a man of the cloth on standby. They will also put a charge on your bill for their services. If you do not wish to have a clergy officiate at the service, ask a friend to say some comforting words. No law says that you must have a clergy perform the service. If you are not clergy and have been asked to speak at or perform the service, please refer to the section in this book entitled, “The Layman’s Funeral Service,” for guidance on what to say.

Ask if you can play a song or read a poem. You may want to put out a scrapbook of the person showing photographs from birth up to death. Display the person’s artwork or any certificates or diplomas they received in life. Whatever a family wants to do should be fine with the funeral home. Just ask the funeral director and they will be happy to assist you.

Where is the funeral service going to be held?

The service can be held at the funeral home or at a church. You will need to make this decision when making the funeral arrangements.

Service at the Funeral Home: If the service will be held at the funeral home, there will be a car list that needs to be filled out the night before the funeral. This will let the funeral director know when to start calling names for people to get in their cars for the drive to the cemetery. The funeral director will need to know the following information:

- Who are the pallbearers for the service?
- Who will be riding in the limousine?
- Will family be the first or last ones to leave after the service?
- Where are the flowers going? To the church, to a nursing home, or will family pick them up after the funeral?

Service at the Church: If you would like to have the service at your church, you will need to call the pastor to see if he or she is available. Most ministers will not charge for services if the person is a member of the church. Sometimes a minister is a friend of the family and will not charge for his or her services. Prior to the service, here are some questions that need to be answered:

- Ask about music. Is it okay to bring a tape in to play at the service? Can someone play the organ or piano

before the funeral starts? If someone plays the organ or piano, there is usually a fee for that service. You should be permitted to have the song you choose even if it is not a religious one. I once had a family that wanted a certain song played and the choir leader said, “No.” The choir was visiting from another church that a family member got. I let them sing their song and then I proceeded with what the family wanted.

- Some ministers may want the casket closed during the service. You may want it opened. Clear this matter up before the day of the service. You do not need a problem the day of the funeral.
- You may wish to leave some of the flowers at the church after the service. Don’t assume that it will be okay to leave them. Ask the minister ahead of time if it will be okay.
- A Memorial Service should be like any other service. Always speak to the minister for advice on any matters that may concern you or the family during the planning of your loved one’s service.
- You may want to make a donation to the church in memory of your loved one. Again this is not usually necessary. Ask ahead of time.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE VIEWING

If the casket cannot be opened for any reason, the funeral director will let you know. Please remember that he or she

is there to help you. They usually know what is best for the families they serve. Just be sure to ask questions.

Day One -- the first viewing will be very hard. This is the first visit for the family. This day will become a picture that is burned in your memory forever. Time will not remove it and words of comfort will never completely take it away. You may not want to go into the room, but you know in your heart that you must. You may need someone to help you walk into the room; as your legs may become weak or you may be crying too hard to move. Remember that the funeral staff and other family members are there for you. You will ask a million times, “Why?” But no one can answer that question, and no one can console you. After a few minutes, you may need to sit down. Take a few moments for you. Soon, many friends and neighbors will be arriving. You know you must greet these people. But you are really not ready for all of that, are you? You may see friends that you have not seen in years, but they are there for you. All of them will be coming because your loved one has touched their lives in some way. You will take notice of the flowers that have been sent. Prayer cards will line the walls and be placed in front of the rainbow-colored flowers. But you really don’t care about any of that. All you want is your loved one. You want things to be the way they were before. But you know that will never happen. But somehow you will get through it.

Day Two -- will not be any easier. There will be more flowers, prayer cards and friends that will arrive. Time seems to pass by so fast. You still can’t believe it. However, it is real. Your loved one has died. And you are faced with decisions you did not want to make. After

everyone has gone, you are now alone to say good-bye. This is the last day you will be with the one you loved so much. A good-bye is extremely hard. You may not want to leave, but you must; because tomorrow, you have a funeral to attend.

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

You're back at the funeral home or at the church. You just pulled up and the rows of cars seem endless. Reality sets in and you feel like you are falling apart. How can you go on? As you walk into the room everyone is seated. There is no talking like the night before during the viewing. You walk up to the casket and feel an emptiness overcome you that you have never felt before. Before you know it, the service is over. You may not want to leave, but time has run out and now you must say good-bye. You will then take the worst ride of your life, to the cemetery. Once everyone has arrived and after a short prayer, your loved one is laid to rest.

The funeral service today can be done in good taste with or without a spiritual message. Remember that if a minister or priest is doing the service, it will be more spiritual, and each may do something slightly different. Below is an outline that I begin with for all funerals. After speaking with a family to find out exactly what they want, I can then adjust the outline accordingly.

SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR FUNERAL SERVICES

Opening Scripture and Prayer

1. “We are here to celebrate the life of (say person’s name).”
2. “The family would like to thank everyone for the cards and flowers.”
3. “Before I continue, is there anyone who would like to say a few words?” ***Be very careful and make sure you have family meet with them first. I have had major issues when you don’t know what people are going to say.***
4. You may also have people read scripture verses.

Next, you may want a song played

Most funeral homes have a selection of music for you to choose from. You can also take your own music and they will arrange to play it for you. You should choose whatever song your loved one would have wanted.

Next, speak about the person’s life. Talk about some of their hobbies or trips they may have taken. Talk about what they enjoyed doing. Speak about what kind of person they were. If they were a giving person, say that. Remember, funeral services are for the living, not for the dead. People will wait to see if the speaker will be honest. You do not have to give every detail; you can condense it down. You can speak about their battles in life; drugs, alcohol or even with the law. Tell about what they were like. You could share a funny story about something that they always did. Let everyone know that he or she will be missed, but never forgotten. You will miss their smile, their personality, their

love and their friendship. Talk about the memories. Talk about the good times.

Next, talk about the person's family and friends that they are leaving behind

Mom and Dad; brothers and sisters; children and grandparents; friends and anyone else you want to mention. If they had pets, you can mention them, too.

Next, be thankful that we had the opportunity to know and love the deceased

We do not come as a judge or jury today, for no one has the right to judge another. The person was who he or she was. They were part of our lives. Tell the people who came to the service that we should be thankful for the time we got to spend with them and the opportunity to have loved them.

Next, speak about everyone's obligation to each other

Speak of the importance of remembering our loved ones. Tell them that their loved one left us a treasure chest of memories. We can use them any time we are hurting or are sad. And most importantly, talk about how they should be there to comfort one another.

Next, you or a family member or friend may want to read a poem

There are some moving poems located in the Appendix under "Poems You May Want to Use at a Funeral Service." The one I think is really good, but very emotional is, "If Tomorrow Starts Without Me."

Ask if anyone would like to say anything else before you close.

Read another verse of scripture (your own selection or one from this book).

Next, is the Closing Prayer

I try to make every funeral service a celebration of the deceased person's life. I sometimes do the unexpected in hopes that people will remember. I was doing a funeral of a young man that passed away because of drugs. Just before the closing prayer, I picked up the young man's child. I then walked up to the casket and had a closing prayer asking God to remember the child as he grew into an adult. I also asked God to touch the hearts of the people who were at the funeral and to always remember their friendship with this family.

At my nephew Harry's funeral, I did something that people would remember for the rest of their lives. Yes, Harry died because of drugs. That did not make him a bad person; he simply made a bad choice. Everyone loved Harry. He was a good student and played football. So right after the prayer I requested that everyone remember Harry in death as they remembered him on the football field. As they stood up I began to clap. Then everyone in attendance did the same. It was a funeral everyone remembers. I learned afterwards that some of the teachers said my actions were not appropriate. That my actions told people that Harry was a hero and that was the wrong message to send to the students. I only wish they told my sister (Harry's mother) that or the students that knew Harry. Just because he lost his life by making the wrong decision does not mean he was a bad kid.

At the graveside

Make it short. I usually read Psalm 23 followed by a short prayer.

THE LAYMAN'S FUNERAL SERVICE

If you are a layman and have been asked to perform the service or speak at a funeral, here are some tips that may be helpful for you.

If you are doing the entire funeral service, you can ride in the hearse. Just let the funeral home know. If you are riding in the hearse you will walk out in front of the casket all the way to the back door of the hearse. You will stand by the back door and wait for the funeral director to open it. You remain at the backdoor until the casket is placed in the hearse. You can then enter on the passenger's side of the hearse and ride to the cemetery with the director. When you get to the cemetery you will again go to the back door of the hearse but stand off to the side and wait until the casket is out. You will then lead the casket to the grave side. If you have questions you can ask the funeral director and they will assist you.

Public speaking is not an easy thing to do. If you are only doing part of the service, make sure you know what part you are doing before the service starts. If you are reading a scripture verse, take the time to read over it. You want to read without mistakes. If you are asked to read a scripture verse, be sure to ask the family if they have a particular verse they want read. If not, and you do not have one, you can refer to the chapter, "Scriptures Verses That Can

Provide Comfort,” and you may find one there that you can use.

Here are some helpful tips:

- When speaking to the family:
 - speak softly and gently
 - take hold of the person’s hand you are speaking to
 - look them in the eyes
 - You may want to say, “I’m so sorry this has happened.”
 - Be sure to keep eye contact. If you are nervous or if you are an emotional person, it may help to look at their forehead. It will look like you’re looking right at them and it will help you to get through a difficult time.
- You can be a great help to a family if you listen to what they want.
- Find out if the family wants a particular scripture verse read, poem or song played. The family may have one that they would like for you to read. If they do, be sure you have it before the service. Announce that the reading is one that the family asked you to read. There are poems in the “Poems and Short Stories” section of this book that you may want to use as well.
- Be sure to write out your service
- Be sure to have your notes ready and any scripture verses marked in your Bible.
- Twenty minutes is usually a sufficient amount of time for a service.
- When you begin the service, let the family and friends know that you are not a professional.

- If you are asked to perform the entire service, you can follow the “Sample Outline For Funeral Services” that I provided and feel free to change it to whatever the family wants. Ask the people to bow their heads for an opening prayer. You may use your own prayer, or you may use this one.

Lord God, we come to you today shocked and hurt by what has happened. From the very presence of death we call upon you, for you are the giver of life. You know our hearts Father; you see our pain and feel our grief. Only you can give us comfort. Only you can dry our tears; and only you can truly feel our pain. Although we do not fully understand this death, we ask for your guidance. Please comfort our hearts today and help us in our hour of need. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

- Ask the people to bow their heads in closing prayer. Again, you may use your own prayer, or you may use this one.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the memories our loved one has left behind. Thank you for not only the family but also for all of the friends that are here today. Comfort our hearts Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Remember, that there is a time and place for everything. Always remember the family.

CHAPTER 11

HOW OTHERS ARE COPING AFTER THEIR LOSS

This chapter is a collection of poems and short stories that people have shared with me over the years. I did not personally write these stories so when you see the word “I” in this section; it is referring to the author of the story and not me personally. With the exception of the first poem, that was written by my son Caleb shortly after his Grandfather passed away, I do not remember who told the stories. Some were written by former students and some by people who attended my death and dying classes. The stories will provide a glimpse into the pain, sadness and emptiness that follows after losing a loved one. Many of these appeared in my book, We Never Said Good Bye.

Caleb's Poem

by Caleb A. Wright

Now I am feeling worthless, cold and unattractive
And you're gone from my life.
It's so disturbing and really quite unnerving
The way our time had to end.
On the day you left me, it seems so dark and hazy,
Like time stopped just for me.
Laying in your old bed, the place where you slept,
Is where I feel close to you.
You were the reason I kept on believing in life,
But that has been lost.
Oh please forgive me, it's only that I miss you,
That I think I can't survive.
So keep on resting, I hope that you like heaven,
But I wish you were here.
In my times of struggle, please watch over my shoulder,
And I won't feel all alone.

Tomorrow will be six months without you,
Or since I heard your voice.
I don't try to think of it. It always just creeps up,
Can you see me down here?
Staring into heaven, in your place of resting,
I hope it's your wildest dreams.
And for me, I'll try to move on, so focused on every
moment,
that I will find peace inside.
Oh, please forgive me, in thoughts you'll never leave
me,
And now I must move on.

Regrets

I remember after my father died there were things I wished I had said to him. Places I wished I would have taken him to. But the one thing I regret most is I wish I would have said, "Dad, I love you." We all say the words, but I could have said them more often. I had an extra ticket to the ball game one night. I never asked my dad to go. I thought, "I'll take him some other time." But time ran out for ball games. No more time for fishing or hunting, and no more time to say, "I love you." Now when I say, "Dad I love you," I only pray that he hears me. Yes, I have regrets, I wish now I could take back the angry words. I wish now I would have taken more time buying his birthday, Father's Day and Christmas cards. I do have regrets. I wish I would have cut the grass like I promised. And I could have taken the time to wash his car. And rake the leaves that fell from that big tree in the yard. I regret not taking his advice on things I did that turned out wrong in my life. I regret the lies I told. I regret the days I promised him that I would come over to visit but my friends were more important. I regret so many things now. All I do is live in the past and think of what I could have done and the things I could have said. Yes, I do have regrets. But I know he loved me, and I know in his heart he knew I loved him even with all my imperfections. So today keep that promise and say the things you need to say. And when tomorrow comes you will have no regrets.

The Snow Angel

The moon was bright, and it took only a moment for me to find that special star. It was the one you gave to me on that cold December night. I remember you called it the Dream Star. On that night we laughed as we walked in the cold winter's snow; holding hands and thinking of the long life

we would have together. We stopped by an old pine tree that was covered with snow. It was by that snow-covered pine that you made me a Snow Angel. And I thought, "What a wonderful thing to do." For a few moments on that night we lived our lives without interruption from the busy outside world. We gave names to our unborn children and we even took time and built our dream home. We talked about retirement and how we would take care of our grandchildren. We lived our entire life on the cold December night. It was just the two of us along with the Dream Star and the Snow Angel that knew about our plans. However, plans do change. And they change without warning. It was only a day later that the love of my life never returned home. I am left now with memories of his accident. As for my dreams? They have also passed. However, there is one thing that stayed behind. A few days after the funeral, I felt so alone. I walked back to that old pine tree, our footprints still outlined that cold December night. And the Snow Angel was the same.

If I Could

If I could bring you back I would do anything. I would work day and night. I would climb the highest mountain. I would swim the widest sea. I would run a million miles. And climb the highest tree. If only I could have you back. Even for a moment. Why? Because I miss you. I missed you last night, I miss you now; and I will miss you tomorrow. I would be happy again; if only you could come back to me.

My New Life Without You

I went out for the first time today. I walked with friends, yet I walked alone. We went to lunch, but yet I ate alone. I

am so lonely without you by my side. I cry alone. I sleep alone. No matter where I am, I feel so alone without you by my side. No matter where I go and no matter what I do, I only think of one thing, and that is being here with you. I am moving on with my new life, but I am not moving very fast. For I live in yesterdays they never seem to pass.

Where Will I Find Comfort

My sleep is interrupted with your memories. The nights seem to be getting longer. And the mornings are filled with the sadness of your passing. I know that I am not alone; yet, I feel alone. I feel empty. I feel tired. Nothing matters in my life. I seek comfort; yet, I cannot find it. The peace that I knew before, I do not know now. And they said in time I will feel better. But what they do not understand is that time has stopped for me. All day long I think of the past, for it is the past that holds my comfort. I do not live today nor will I live tomorrow, for I am trapped in time. As a child I did not like history. But now I find myself going back to the old places. I look at the old pictures; I even sing the old songs. And they all remind me of you. For now, my comfort is not in the present. And for now, I see no future. So where does my comfort lie? What a silly question; I find it in the days that have now gone by.

The Dance

I remember the autumn leaves falling as I walked up the staircase to the ballroom. Everything was just the way it should be. In fact, everything was perfect. The fall flowers lined the tables, the crystal glass sparkled as the lights were turned down. The music was that of the big band sound from the 1920's. As my eyes roamed across the sea of honored guests, I noticed that they were all elderly and

seemed to be at peace with themselves. Then, my eyes focused upon a lovely lady; so elegant, and ever so beautiful. I wanted to ask her to dance. Dare I ask? I thought, surely, her reply would be no! Surely, she was waiting for her prince. She looked over at me and a smile came upon her face. I will never forget how I felt as she moved toward me. The people who were dancing moved aside as she walked across the white marble floor. It was as if though they were waiting for this moment to happen. As she passed them they moved off the dance floor, but the band played on. As she approached me, it was like an angel that came down from heaven for a lost soul. She extended her right hand and we began to dance. It was this beautiful angel and I dancing like I never danced before. And the honored guests, well, they just watched and smiled as she and I danced across the white marble floor. It was like this whole thing had been planned. The people, the fall flowers, the white marble dance floor and the crystal glass. Oh, yes! The autumn leaves, we must not forget the autumn leaves. Then before I knew it, I was in my room. For this was all a dream. That beautiful lady I was dancing with, had been my wife of fifty years. Yes! My wife! But she died a few weeks ago. But how could this be? Oh yes! It was just a dream.

The Angel of Death

Oh death, do you know what you have done to me? You have robbed me and taken away my life. There is no peace or comfort for me, not now, not later. No matter what I try to do, I still think of them. The days are long, and the nights are even longer. Why could you not have taken me instead? Oh death, you are always present. The cross on the highway tells me of your unwanted visit. And the sobbing

mother at a baby's crib tells me you have no heart. The wedding that was canceled tells me you have no compassion. That family that did not bring back their son from their vacation tells me how you must enjoy your grim tasks. Oh death, I wanted to come to you last night. I have thought about this so many times. But I cannot, No! I must not. But you can come for me. My only companions in life are your brothers ... Sadness, Sorrow, Grief and Pain. Death, don't say you came from God, for it is God that I curse. It was God that let this happen. If there were a God, He would know my pain. If there were a God? Can He not see my broken heart? If there was a God? Yes, only if there was a God. Where was he? Death why did you steal from me? For now, I have no reason to get up from my bed. I cannot face the day. No one understands me now. Am I the only one that feels this pain? For I have never felt this way before. Oh Death, when will you come for me? For now, I welcome you. Only you can take me to my love. My tears will never stop, and the pain will never leave. So, death must I wait and give tomorrow another try? I just wanted you to know, we never said good-bye.

The Shock of Death

The moment I was told you died, time froze for me. I never expected it. I thought this just couldn't be. Oh, God! Please, this cannot be! But it is true, you are gone. So, answer this "O, Mighty God," Why? Why have you taken the one I love from me? I never asked why before. I never asked because everything in my life was perfect. We had a good home, a great family and a fine job. We had it all; everything a person wanted in life. Now all I want is you. All I think about is, "Why"? Why me? Why did God take you? Why our family? Why were you the first to go? Why?

Why? Why? Can anyone answer that? I want to know. No, I demand to know. So, God, I ask this question once again. Why have you taken my love away?

Death by Suicide

He was such a good friend. No one expected him to take his life. He had a wonderful family and so many friends. I will never forget that night when I received the call. It was his brother that gave me the news. I was shocked, and I am still haunted today by his death. My friend was taken to the hospital but there was no hope. He died a few hours later. I am writing this because of my feelings. I felt so much hurt. I thought like everyone else thought, "What could I have done to stop this terrible tragedy?" After the funeral, some of my friends saw a change in me. I was very sharp to the ones I spoke to. I found myself throwing fits of anger in the office and at home. Then I realized what made me act this way. Although my friend had taken his life, he left me feeling guilty that I wasn't there to help him. I guess the words I am looking for is displaced aggression. I was upset at my friend for taking his life and I took it out on other people; the salesman that came to my door; the man who accidentally cut me off while I was driving; the paper boy who delivered my paper late or the person that pulled into my parking spot. I was mad at my friend and I took my anger out on others.

I remember feeling so much sadness. It was almost more than I could bear. I loved my friend; yet I was mad at him for what he had done. I'll never understand why he did not come to me or to some of his other friends or family. He was such a good man; so respected and loved by all. But I guess we never know how someone really feels inside. I am

not alone in my feelings. We all have felt the same thing. "What could I have done?" Day after day I just kept asking, "Why?"

So, I went to the cemetery and I talked to my friend at his resting place. After I told him of my hurt and anger, I said, "But you know I loved you like a brother." I still think of him, it's only been a few months, but it seems like yesterday. And no matter how much time passes I will never forget him. I can picture him cutting the grass working alongside of his brother. And that smile of his would light up the room. He was always there for me. We played golf together and we even sang in the church choir on men's day. God I miss him! I guess he did what he thought was best. But his decision has left so many of us with broken hearts. I am over my anger now however the pain of his death is still with me and will remain with me until the day I die. So, my friend, I just wanted you to know that everyone will miss you. Not only today but for all of the tomorrow's that God will give to us. No one can ever replace you and no one ever will. God Bless You. We all loved you. Rest in Peace.

I Have Some Things for You

For a short time, I'll be with you; and I guess that's better than no time at all.

Soon I will leave; however, I will be back because I have some things for you.

In the Winter I will bring the snow; and lay it so gently on the ground.

And in the Spring, I will place the flowers all around.

When Summer comes I'll bring to you an ocean deep and skies so blue.

And in the Fall, I'll paint the leaves, and give them all to you.

I may be gone, but I'll be back because I have some things for you.

Let's Live Until We Say Goodbye

No one lives forever. Not you, not me, not anyone. There is a time to live and a time to die. Today I want to live.

I want to sing a song. I want to take a walk in the woods. I want to laugh. I want to see the sunset. I want to feel the snow on my face. I want to watch an icicle melt in the sun.

Today I want to live.

I want to see the moon and I want to count the stars. I want my eyes to drift upon a cloud as if though it were sailing on the deep blue sea. Why? Because, today I want to live.

I do not want to talk about the doctors or hospitals or treatments. Today I want to live.

I want to feel free. I want to feel the wind blowing in my face. Yes, today I want to live.

I want to live, just one day without the fear and worry of what is now. And I want you to do the same.

Let's not think about goodbyes, please not today.

For today I want to live.

I want to feel the sun on my face. And maybe together we could see just one more rainbow. I want to see children play. I want to hear their laughter. I want to touch a flower.

I want to live today.

And if there is no time for one last goodbye, then you will remember, you let me live today.

Because of Me

I know you wanted to give up when you got sick. But you were a fighter and it was just because of me. And I know you never wanted that operation. But you went through it anyway and that was just because of me. And I know you never wanted to take those treatments because they made you sick. But you took them anyway, and it was just because of me. I remember the day you brought me flowers. You stopped on your way home, and stood in the pouring rain, just because of me. You worked so hard throughout your life. And it was just because of me. So in my moment of despair, I just want to say, "Thank you so much, for always being there for me."

Time

Where has the time gone? And how did I make it this far? I still remember you. I remember your smile and your wonderful personality. I remember your sense of humor and I remember you. It seems like the funeral was just yesterday. I can't believe how fast time goes by. I still go to your grave but not every day like I did before. I go into your room and I listen to your music and I look at your picture. And I cry but not like I did before. But I wanted you to know it's not because I have forgotten you. God knows I never will. The world has moved but I stood still and it's all because of you.

A Giant Step

I went to the movies for the first time, I sat in the same seats that we sat in. I think it was a sad movie because I

cried from the time I sat down until the time the movie was over. But I made it. And, I am glad I went. I think I will go on a trip with the seniors in the church next week. If that's ok with you. And I finally rearranged your room. It has looked that way since you...since you... since you... died. There I said it. Yes, it has looked that way since you died. I am moving on, but I wanted you to know, you will always be with me. And I'll always love you no matter where I go.

CHAPTER 12

THE CHURCH FAMILY

DO YOU BELONG TO A CHURCH?

The church family is very important. It's an extension of your own family. The members of a church can bring a sense of belonging and purpose to your life. They can provide spiritual and emotional support and encouragement. They will also pray for you and provide comfort in times of sorrow. One thing I do know is that when a member of the church is suffering or is in need, the church family is quick to respond to their need.

Tips to remember when looking for a church

1. There is no perfect church.
2. There is no perfect minister. All ministers sin just like everyone else.
3. Don't try to change the church... instead focus on changing yourself.
4. Don't listen to gossip or spread it.
5. There is no perfect Christian.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life. (John 3:16, underlining added for emphasis).

With that being said, members should not be judgmental, and everyone should feel welcome. The church should be like a doorway to heaven. I remember a story I read a few months back.

The setting was a college campus. The local church would send witnessing teams out to colleges to try to get people into the church. The young man in charge of this particular witnessing team was college-aged and knew how to relate to young people. He invited a college student to attend service. The student promised to attend Sunday services. But what the young man on the witnessing team forgot to tell him was that he would not be there on that specific Sunday.

Sunday came and sure enough the college student kept his word and he went to church. However, there was a slight problem. It was the way he was dressed. He had on an old college tee shirt and no shoes. And, he was late for the services. The sanctuary was filled, and the student could not find a seat. He looked in every row from left to right but found no available seats. Everyone was watching him as he worked his way to the front. The pastor was leading the singing as the young man soon found himself in front of the entire congregation. No one offered their seat, so the young man simply sat on the floor, right in front of the pastor. The pastor looked confused and somewhat worried to see this behavior. Everyone was looking around as if to say,

“Who was this kid and what in the world was he doing?”

In the back of the church sat the oldest deacon. He slowly gets up from his seat and walks to the front of the church holding on to the pews as he went. The old deacon finally arrived where the young man was sitting. He braced himself on the front pew and stooped down as if he was going to speak to the student. To everyone’s surprise the old deacon sits right next to the student. They exchange smiles and then the old deacon whispers in the young student’s ear and says, “I didn’t want you to sit alone.”

Let’s go back to the scripture verse of John 3:16. Remember the word, ‘whosoever’. This means an open invitation to everyone. No matter who you are, where you come from, or what you may have done in your past, you are welcome to come into the house of God. This deacon showed God’s love, and this is the kind of church that you want to find.

MY CHURCH FAMILY - MERRITT PARK BAPTIST CHURCH

I have been the pastor of our church for forty-three years. We are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Our main focus of the church is sharing God’s word. We believe that one day the Lord will return. Our goal is to get you into the family of God without judging you. We believe everyone, regardless of lifestyle choices, has the

right to come to the Lord. We don't care about your past; but we do care about your eternity.

Although our church is small in number, as far as I am concerned, we have the best group of Christians in the world. They are funny, caring, loving and God fearing. Our congregation currently consists of a lot of senior citizens. Many of the youth have grown up, families have moved away, or the new generation just isn't much into old time religion.

Our Worship Services

- Our services are rather simple. We do not have a dress code. Regardless of weather conditions, our church is always open for Sunday Worship Service at 11am.
- We have special services on Christmas Day and on Good Friday. No matter what day Christmas falls on, we always have an 11am Christmas Day service.
- Every Good Friday we have a two-part healing and prayer service. The first part is where we pray for the physically sick. It has been during these services that we have seen God heal people with cancer and other illnesses. The second part of the service is for spiritual sickness that we all have. Sometimes our lives can really get out of tune with God's Spirit. Praying for each other is very important for spiritual growth. We have seen miracles take place after prayer. We believe God is in control of all things. As a church we take no credit for what God does. In fact, I have often said how

grateful and honored I am to see God at work in our church.

Our Ministries

- We have a ministry for the addicted population. The Alpha Program, our drug and alcohol education program, is taught at the church on Thursday evenings. We also have a Memorial Garden where we bury, for free, the cremains of anyone who has died as a result of drug or alcohol problems. If you have not yet read about the Garden, you can find that information under the section “Memories at Our Church.”
- We collect money and gift cards for needy families at Thanksgiving and Christmas. We have an annual toy drive and distribute toys to needy children in the community.
- We offer Sunday School classes, Bible Study classes and have fellowship outings together throughout the year. And we are looking forward to regularly using our new Bobby Phipps Prayer Garden for many functions: Bible study, cookouts, prayer meetings, etc.
- We have a small choir that you do not have to try out for. We encourage everyone to sing, worship and praise our Lord.
- We also provide wedding and funeral services to the community.

Becoming a member of our church

We encourage people to visit our church. You can visit and never join the church, or you can request membership simply by asking. We do not go to anyone's home unannounced and we do not pressure anyone into becoming a member. We do not have pledge cards asking for money. We do take up an offering during our services, but we do not require tithing. Once a month, we also take up a benevolence offering which is used to help members of our church in times of need. Once someone becomes a member, we do encourage them to get involved with church activities.

If you're in Maryland, and are looking for a church home, we invite you to stop by for a visit. Take a look at our website: www.merrittparkbaptistchurch.org. I am happy to meet with you and show you around our church. If you do not find that our church is where you should be, I am happy to assist you in finding the church you're looking for. We do not compete with other churches for members. There are many ministers that have great programs. We just want to get people into a church where they can hear the Word of God, grow in faith and share the Word of God with everyone.

THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING FOR A CHURCH

1. What denomination do you want to attend?

There are many Christian denominations ... Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene, and the list goes on. If you feel called to a non-denominational or inter-denominational church, there are many different types of those as well, such as: Pentecostal, Charismatic and Community churches.

2. What type of worship service are you looking for?

Would you feel more comfortable worshipping through a formal liturgy? Or, would you enjoy the freedom of worshipping in a more relaxed, informal environment? For example, Catholic, Anglican, Episcopalian, Lutheran and Orthodox churches will usually have more formal services. They also tend to have more formal dress codes. Protestant, Pentecostal, Baptist and non-denominational churches tend to be more informal and generally do not have a strict dress code.

3. What do they believe?

It's important to understand the doctrinal beliefs of the church before joining. Many people become disillusioned after investing a great deal of time in a church. You can avoid this disappointment by looking closely at the church's statement of faith. Before joining, be sure the church teaches the Bible effectively. If you're not sure, ask to talk with someone about this. Some churches even offer classes or have written material to help you understand the church's doctrine.

4. **Is the foundation of home and church soundly structured?**

When storms come, the stability and the foundation of the church and the home must be soundly structured. Our church does not like problems within the church family and will address them as quickly as possible. Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-27, that the wise man builds his house upon rock and the foolish man builds his house upon sand. It reads as follows:

²⁴Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: ²⁵And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. ²⁶And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: ²⁷And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. -- (Matthew 7:24-27).

There should be a strong commitment to high-quality Bible teaching. We are instructed to mediate on the Word day and night as Bible study is essential in church and family growth. As senior pastor I always like to challenge our congregation, so we can all grow in the grace and knowledge of God and be guided by His righteous law.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and

comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4).

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. -- (2 Timothy 2:15).

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:8).

5. Where does God want you to serve?

I suggest you do the following:

- a. Do your own research. There is plenty of information either online or at your local library about different denominations.
- b. Visit different churches. Talk to members of the congregation. Keep a list of your visits and note any positive or negative vibes that you experienced.
- c. Ask the minister questions.
- d. Ask for a copy of the church constitution and their doctrinal beliefs.
- e. Ask if they believe in certain things because if you don't know, it could become a problem down the road.
- f. Ask about the ministries that the church is involved with.
- g. Most importantly, pray about it. Study God's word. He will lead you to the path he wants you to take.
- h. Once you find your church home, get involved.

CHAPTER 13

SALVATION

I came to know the Lord because of a high school teacher. He took the time to invite me to church and introduce me to Jesus. My life has been like a roller coaster ride, up and down, side to side. Things have happened during my life that caused me to leave the side of the Lord and try things on my own. Every time I would leave the Lord, I'd fall flat on my face. I try to encourage people not to wait until they feel like they are good enough to accept the Lord because that day will never come. None of us will ever be good enough. I have some scriptures that I would like you to read over. The scriptures will help you to know that **now is the time** to come to accept Jesus as Lord and Master of your life.

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF SALVATION?

God did not take your loved one away to punish you or them. In fact, God created us to live forever on Earth. It was man who sinned against God which resulted in earthly death and so therefore, suffering is a part of life. However, there is hope through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior that

if we are children of God, we will receive everything that He has promised; and it will be glorious.

¹⁷And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. ¹⁸For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:17-18).

Salvation is deliverance from our sins.

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23).

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23).

What are we saved from?

In the Christian doctrine of salvation, we are saved from “wrath,” that is, from God’s judgment of sin. It is sin that separates us from God. And only God can remove sin and deliver us from sin’s penalty.

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2).

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (Psalm 30:5).

HOW DO WE RECEIVE SALVATION?

God does not want us to experience his wrath. What He wants is for us to have a personal relationship with Him. He wants to give us His gift of eternal life, forever worshiping, honoring and glorifying Him.

To receive salvation, first, we must *hear* the gospel.

²⁷And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: ²⁸So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:27-28).

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6).

²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26, NIV).

We must believe - fully trust the Lord Jesus

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (Romans 5:9).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... (Romans 1:16).

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13).

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved... (Acts 16:31).

Recognize that we are sinners

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10, NIV).

²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he

might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:23-26).

Then, we must be born again

Once you accept Christ into your heart, you must live for Him, according to His Gospel. Living a Christian life is not easy, but we must remember to seek God for His strength in times of trouble. We must turn from our evil ways and trust God completely.

¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:14-21, NIV).

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:56-58).

⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4).

We are born again when the Spirit of Christ enters our bodies and fills us with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives us life. It is the Spirit that convicts us of sin. In order to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus says this:

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. (John 3:3, NIV).

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. (John 6:63, NIV).

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10, NIV).

⁹That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10).

WHAT SALVATION IS NOT

There are many people in the world today that think salvation is everything BUT accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You may think you are perfect and never do anything wrong. You may think that you can save yourself. Let's look at some more scripture.

You cannot work your way into heaven. We are not saved by the good deeds we perform. And simply attending church will not save you. Understand that we cannot save ourselves.

⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost...(Titus 3:5).

You cannot buy your way into heaven.

It does not matter how much money we have or how successful we are in life.

²⁴And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. ²⁵When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? ²⁶But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:24-26).

Right thinking is not salvation.

You must do more than *think* about salvation. Thinking is not the same as accepting. You must believe in your heart and rest assured, God knows our hearts.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:27).

YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR SALVATION

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. (Jeremiah 8:20).

Many people live in the fast lane of life; some giving no thought about tomorrow, while others plan years in advance. But there is no promise of tomorrow and no matter where we come from, how much money we have or the good deeds we have done; death of our physical bodies here on earth will not escape us. We all know we are going to die but are we ready? Be certain of this... death is

coming... and it is coming for all of us. The question is, "How far is death away?" Death is just around the corner. Are you ready to meet him if he would come today?

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (Revelation 6:8).

Understanding that you are going to die does not have to be scary or depressing. Being aware of our mortality can help us to make better choices. A good way to start is self-examination. Look closely at your relationship with God and everyone else. Think about how you treat people; or how you are so easy to pass judgment upon them. Maybe you have never thought about life after this life until you suffered a loss. I want you to read the following scripture again: John 3:16...

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

That is directed to you. Anyone can enter into a personal relationship with God! **You** can enter into a personal relationship with God right now!

PRAYER FOR SALVATION

If you've felt the 'tug' of God on your heart, you can have the assurance of salvation. By becoming a Christian, you

will take the most important step in your life on earth and so secure your eternal future. If you have never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior now is the time to do that.

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. (Ephesians 1:13).

Entering into a personal relationship with God

We now come to the most important decision we can make in this life. The most important choice we can make is to accept God and Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. No one can make this decision for you. You must make it yourself so listen carefully to what I am saying to you. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, your salvation is not hard to obtain; in fact, it is as simple as ABC – Accept, Believe and Confess.

Accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Confess your sins to Him and ask Him for forgiveness.

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Luke 11:10).

²¹This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. ²²It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,

because his compassions fail not. ²³They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. ²⁴The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. ²⁵The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. ²⁶It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:21-26).

If you are ready to enter into a personal relationship with God, and you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and our Lord and Savior, and you acknowledge and confess that you are a sinner and you believe that only by God's grace and the blood of Jesus that you can be saved, you can speak to Him right now by saying this prayer.

Father God, I am accepting your Son Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I believe that Jesus is the true Son of God and that he died on the cross for my sins. I now confess my sins to you and ask for your forgiveness. I want to enter into a personal relationship with you right now. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A NEW LIFE BEGINS

Once you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, God has made us many promises. Remember your faith in God. Remember all of the answered prayers. Here are some scripture verses that tell us what we have to look forward to when this life ends.

And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. (1 John 2:25).

¹³Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

¹⁴In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins... (Colossians 1:13-14).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16).

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24).

Jesus has promised that He will come again and that the dead in Christ will live again.

¹³But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever

be with the Lord. ¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

²⁸Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:28-29).

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3).

OUR NEW BODIES IN CHRIST

When our human bodies die, our spirit returns to God who gave it to us. He promises us that we will receive new spiritual bodies in Christ; glorious new bodies in Christ. There will be eternal joy. Eternal life spent worshipping our maker in His presence.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4).

²⁰For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (Philippians 3:20-21).

⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

⁴³It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

⁴⁵And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

⁴⁶Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

⁴⁷The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. ⁴⁸As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. ⁴⁹And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. ⁵⁰Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be

brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Corinthians 15:42-55).

CHAPTER 14

FINDING YOUR HAVEN OF REST

The death of a loved one is a traumatic, life-changing event. It will take time and courage for you to overcome this tragedy. It is my prayer for you that you will find the peace that you are seeking and so desperately need. God will hold you up and God will provide you with the peace that you seek today. Find your haven of rest. It is going to be difficult but once found; it will protect your heart and mind from the unbearable suffering you are going through.

As we are born, so shall we die; and some will die sooner than others. We never know how much time God will give to us. Learn to appreciate the days God has given to you. Look for the sun to shine. And stop looking for that dark cloud. You can be certain it will appear on the day you least expect it. Parents love your children, regardless of the choices they make. Ask questions; be nosey and stay alert. Look for the warning signs and seek help. Tell your

children often that you love them; and tell them you love them today because tomorrow, you may not get the opportunity to do so.

A friend told me many years ago, “If you love something too much, you will lose it or they will leave you.” But in life do we not all know that death is right around the corner waiting to take the very one that we love away from us? Don’t let that stop you from loving and continuing to love with all your heart. Keep your loved one alive in your memory. And remember, there are still things for you to be thankful for. Take a moment and thank God for bringing your loved one into your life and providing you with the opportunity to love them so dearly. Thank Him for all of the happy times you had together. Thank Him for the happy times that have yet to come. Joy and happiness is a choice. Don’t run from it and don’t give it up.

If you believe in God, pray. I do know that the prayers, the love, the support and kind words given to a family during the hour of bereavement offer more comfort than you could ever know. Please be sure to keep family and friends in your prayers every day. Remember what you have been taught. Here is where your faith comes in. Heaven is a real place. God has taken back what he let you borrow. God gives no guarantees with children, parents, husbands or wives. He does however make a promise when he says, “...I will wipe away all tears...” (Revelation 21:4). Do you believe that? Then ask God for help right now!

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27).

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always
by all means. The Lord be with you all. -- (2
Thessalonians 3:16).

CLOSING REMARKS

I enjoy telling people how God changed my life and how He was watching over me all along. Even in the times when I thought He had forgotten me; or when I turned my back on Him. God was right there. I have gone through many of the things you are going through right now. I drifted away from the church. I even stopped praying. I found myself back in the world, but God brought me home. The way back was filled with lessons about life, about God and God's people. I had to take a good look in the mirror. I was the real-life story of the prodigal son. My sermons are mostly about changing one's life and doing the things God wants us to do. I encourage people not to be judgmental toward others and to respect everyone we meet in life. I encourage people to cherish every day God has given us and to cherish the people around us. To be grateful for the things that we tend to take for granted each and every day. And to learn to let go of things we cannot control. I encourage people to be kind to themselves and to remember to be kind to others; we do not know the battles someone else is facing. I try explaining to young people how drugs and alcohol can ruin their lives and that God will help them with the problem if only they have a desire to change and a willingness to work at it.

To the young people, remember God does not make junk. At home there may be all kinds of disruptions, but God can change you. If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are now a Christian. You also have a Christian family and many new Christian friends. They are here to help you and Jesus will never leave your side. If you have not given your heart to the Lord, you still have people

praying for you. No matter what you are going through, things can change. You can't change others, but you can change yourself and you can change where you will spend eternity. Remember to respect yourself and take responsibility for your actions. What you are going through in your life others have gone through, and there is hope.

If you use drugs or sell drugs and have a desire to stop, I will always find time to talk to you. If you are thinking that no one cares about you, pick up the phone and call me or send me an email. It doesn't matter who you are or where you live. I do care what happens to you. I care about you and I have never met you. You have the right to be happy and the right to be free. You can live a life that is filled with so many great and wonderful things. If you let Christ walk with you, it is He that will give you strength. Let no man deprive you of your right to know Jesus. It's not about how long your hair is, or who your friends are. It's not about how far you can throw a football or how you dress. It's about what is in your heart, for in the heart you will find the real you. Be honest with yourself and always talk things over with the Lord. Oh, there is one last thing, after you talk with God take a moment and listen to what He has to say.

God Bless you!

APPENDIX

POEMS TO READ AT A FUNERAL SERVICE

Below are some poems I found to be comforting for a grieving family. Some are very emotional so again, you may need to grab some more tissues. There are many other poems available to choose from. If you have access to a computer, you can quickly search for a poem to use. If you do not have access to a computer, ask your Pastor or the funeral director and they should be able to provide assistance. If your loved one had a favorite poem, you can read that as well.

If Tomorrow Starts Without Me

David Romano

If tomorrow starts without me, and I'm not here to see,
If the sun should rise you find your eyes all filled with tears
for me;

I wish so much you wouldn't cry the way you did today,
While thinking of the many things we didn't get to say.
I know how much you love me, as much as I love you
And each time that you think of me, I know you'll miss me
too.

But when tomorrow starts without me please try to
understand,
That an angel came and called my name and took me by the
hand.

He said my place was ready, in heaven far above
And that I'd have to leave behind all those I dearly love.
But as I turned and walked away a tear fell from my eye.
For all my life I'd always thought, I didn't want to die.
I had so much to live for, so much left yet to do.
It seemed almost impossible that I was leaving you.
I thought of all the yesterdays the good ones and the bad.
I thought of all the love we shared, and all the fun we had.
If I could relive yesterday, just even for a while,
I'd say goodbye and kiss you and maybe see you smile.
But then I fully realized that this could never be,
For emptiness and memories would take the place of me.
When I thought of worldly things I might miss come
tomorrow
I thought of you and when I did my heart was filled with
sorrow.
When I walked through heavens gates I felt so much at
home.
God looked down and smiled at me from his great golden
throne
He said, "This is eternity and all I've promised you"
Today your life on earth has passed but here life starts
anew.
I promise no tomorrow, but today will always last
And since each day is the same there's no longing for the
past.
You have been so faithful so trusting and so true.
Though there were times you did some things you knew
you shouldn't do.

You have been forgiven and now at last you're free.

So won't you come and take my hand and share my life
with me?

So, when tomorrow starts without me don't think we're far
apart,
For every time you think of me, I'm right here in your
heart.

***“To Those Whom I Love
and Those Who Love Me”***

Mary Alice Ramish

When I am gone, release me, let me go.
I have so many things to see and do,
You mustn't tie yourself to me with too many tears,
But be thankful we had so many good years.

I gave you my love, and you can only guess
How much you've give me in happiness.
I thank you for the love that you have shown,
But now it is time I traveled on alone.

So, grieve for me a while, if grieve you must,
Then let your grief be comforted by trust.
It is only for a while that we must part,
So, treasure the memories within your heart.

I won't be far away for life goes on.
And if you need me, call and I will come.

Though you can't see or touch me, I will be near.
And if you listen with your heart, you'll hear,
All my love around you soft and clear.

And then, when you come this way alone,
I'll greet you with a smile and a “Welcome Home.”

“Remember Me”

Author Unknown

To the living, I am gone,
To the sorrowful, I will never return,
To the angry, I was cheated,
But to the happy, I am at peace,
And to the faithful, I have never left.

I cannot speak, but I can listen.
I cannot be seen, but I can be heard.
So, as you stand upon a shore gazing at a beautiful sea,
As you look upon a flower and admire its
simplicity,
Remember me.

Remember me in your heart:
Your thoughts, and your memories,
Of the times we loved,
The times we cried,
The times we fought,
The times we laughed.
For if you always think of me, I will never have gone.

“Remember”

Christina Rossetti

Remembering me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

“Let Me Go”

Christina Rossetti

When I come to the end of the road
And the sun has set for me
I want no rites in a gloom filled room
Why cry for a soul set free?
Miss me a little, but not for long
And not with your head bowed low
Remember the love that once we shared
Miss me, but let me go.
For this is a journey we all must take
And each must go alone.
It's all part of the master plan
A step on the road to home.
When you are lonely and sick at heart
Go to the friends we know.
Laugh at all the things we used to do
Miss me, but let me go.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

“All Is Well”
Henry Scott Holland

Death is nothing at all,
I have only slipped into the next room
I am I and you are you
Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.
Call me by my old familiar name,
Speak to me in the easy way which you always used
Put no difference in your tone,
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow
Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed
together.
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.
Let my name be ever the household word that it always
was,
Let it be spoken without effect, without the trace of shadow
on it.
Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same as it ever was, there is unbroken continuity.
Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?
I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near,
Just around the corner.
All is well.

***“Do not stand at my grave
and weep”***

Mary E. Frye

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

“Do Not Weep for Me”

Anonymous

Do not weep for me for I have not gone.

I am the wind that shakes the mighty Oak.

I am the gentle rain that falls upon your face.

I am the spring flower that pushes through the dark earth.

I am the chuckling laughter of the mountain stream.

Do not weep for me for I have not gone.

I am the memory that dwells in the heart of those that knew me.

I am the shadow that dances on the edge of your vision.

I am the wild goose that flies south at Autumns call and I shall return at Summer rising.

I am the stag on the wild hills way.

I am just around the corner.

Therefore, the wise weep not.

But rejoice at the transformation of my Being.

Songs to Play at a Funeral Service

Here are some popular songs, both religious and non-religious, that you may want to play during a funeral service. You may also just want to listen to them whenever you are feeling sad or are looking for strength and encouragement.

Popular Church Hymns

- “Abide with Me”
- “Amazing Grace”
- “All to Jesus I Surrender”
- “Alleluia”
- “Be Thou My Vision”
- “Because He Lives”
- “Blessed Assurance”
- “Breathe on Me”
- “Good Night and Good Morning”
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”
- “How Great Thou Art”
- “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say”
- “I Need Thee Every Hour”
- “In the Garden”
- “In Times Like These”
- “It Is Well with My Soul”
- “Just As I Am”
- “Nearer My God to Thee”
- “Rock of Ages”
- “Roll Jordan Roll”
- “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

- “The King of Love, My Shepherd Is”
- “There is a Balm in Gilead”
- “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”
- “When We Walk with The Lord”

Other Popular Songs

- “Tears In Heaven” by Eric Clapton
- “I’m Gonna Live Until I Die” by Frank Sinatra
- “I’ll Fly Away” by Hank Williams
- “If Tomorrow Never Comes” by Garth Brooks
- “What Hurts the Most” by Rascal Flatts
- “I Drive Your Truck” by Lee Brice
- “Live Like You Were Dying” by Tim McGraw
- “If I Die Young” by The Band Perry
- “If You Get There Before I Do” by Collin Raye
- “If Heaven Wasn’t So Far Away” by Justin Moore
- “Go Rest High On That Mountain” by Vince Gill
- “Don’t Blink” by Kenny Chesney
- “The Dance” by Garth Brooks
- “Love, Me” by Collin Raye
- “Here Comes Goodbye” by Rascal Flatts
- “Tell Me I Was Dreaming” by Travis Tritt
- “Arlington” by Trace Adkins
- “Candle in the Wind” by Elton John
- “One Sweet Day” by Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men
- “My Heart Will Go On” by Celine Dion

SCRIPTURE VERSES THAT CAN PROVIDE COMFORT

There are times when only God's word can bring comfort. Here are some scripture verses that may be helpful for you to read when you are feeling sad or you need God's strength.

- **The Lord's Prayer**

⁹...Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13).

- The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. ³ He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. ⁵ Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:1-6).
- Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go

to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. ⁴ And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. (John 14:1-4).

- ¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ¹⁷ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17).
- ⁶ Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁷ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁸ We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).
- ¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).
- ⁹ For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. ¹¹ Wherefore comfort yourselves together,

and edify one another, even as also ye do. -- (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

- Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. (Psalm 31:9).
- The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. (Psalm 34:18).
- He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3).
- Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4).
- Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27).
- I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (John 14:18).
- God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ²Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea... (Psalm 46:1-2).
- For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (Psalm 30:5).

- These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33).
- ¹⁶ Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).
- Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. (Isaiah 49:13).
- For I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. (Jeremiah 31:13b).
- ³ Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; ⁴ Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
- To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; ³ A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ A time to

weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4).

- ¹⁶ Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. ¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. ¹⁸ Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins. (Psalm 25:16-18).
- And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows. (Exodus 3:7).
- For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. (Psalm 22:24).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. (John 8:51).
- He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (Psalm 91:1).
- These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33).
- Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;

yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. (Isaiah 41:10).

- When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (Isaiah 43:2).
- And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4).
- This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. (Psalm 119:50).
- My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. (Psalm 73:26).
- Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Wright has been the Pastor at Merritt Park Baptist Church in Dundalk, Maryland for the past forty-three years. He is a retired undercover narcotics agent for the Baltimore City Police Department. In addition to his pastoral duties, for about forty years he has led the Alpha Program, a drug and alcohol education class, for the State of Maryland. During this time period, Dr. Wright has buried one hundred and eighteen of his students, along with an unknown number of addicts that he did not personally know. To help ease the burden of burial expenses for family members, the cremains of anyone who dies as a result of substance abuse can be buried in the Memorial Garden located on the church grounds, at no cost to the family.

Please visit

www.marylandduiclasses.com

or

www.merrittparkbaptistchurch.org

to learn about substance abuse education classes taught through the Alpha Program and for information about the Memorial Garden located on the grounds of Merritt Park Baptist Church.

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