

In recent days, we've heard about both Roseanne Barr and Samantha Bee "shooting themselves in the foot" by making ill-considered comments in public venues. Their stories give us an opportunity to think about how our comments and talk reflect who we are, a matter that is especially important for us who identify ourselves as followers of Jesus.

If you'd prefer a different topic, look at our second lesson, which reflects on changing trends in the way Americans prepare for their own death and process grief when someone dies. Increasingly, people are choosing cremation over traditional burial rituals. We explore some reasons for these shifts, and consider how our Christian faith helps us deal with our own grief and mortality, as well as how the gospel message provides hope and comfort to those who mourn.

The Editorial Team of *The Wired Word*



Roseanne Barr and Samantha Bee Apologize for Their Comments in Separate Incidents *The Wired Word* for the Week of June 10, 2018

In the News

Within days of each other, two celebrity women -- Roseanne Barr and Samantha Bee -- damaged their reputations and offended others with unsavory public comments about political figures. In both cases, the outcry over the language used rendered their remarks counterproductive and provided "ammunition" to those who oppose the differing political views of Barr and Bee.

Both Barr and Bee have issued apologies, but those have done little to silence critics. And in the case of Barr, her newly rebooted sitcom, *Roseanne*, was canceled by ABC as a result. It's not yet clear what career fallout, if any, there will be for Bee, but her show has already lost a couple of sponsors.

On May 29, Barr posted a tweet about Valerie Jarrett, who is black and was a senior advisor to former President Barack Obama. In a tweet, Barr wrote "muslim brotherhood & planet of the apes had a baby=vj." In her subsequent apology to Jarrett by name, Barr made clear that the "vj" had been a reference to Jarrett by her initials. Many people considered Barr's tweet a racist slur.

The Wired Word has not found any public reference by Jarrett to being a member of any religion. According to Snopes, there is no evidence that she is a Muslim. This perception was created due to a falsely attributed quote. She has no known connection to the Muslim Brotherhood, but the reference might have come from Jarrett's having been born in Iran to American parents, combined with Barr's habit of retweeting conspiracy theories without verifying them.

Barr was initially defensive, and tweeted "ISLAM is not a RACE, lefties. Islam includes EVERY RACE of people." She later deleted the tweet and posted an apology, stating she was "truly sorry

for making a bad joke about [Jarrett's] politics and her looks." Later still, Barr explained that she made the Jarrett tweet, which she called wrong and indefensible, at 2:00 a.m. while on Ambien, a sedative.

Sanofi, which manufactures Ambien, responded by tweeting, "While all pharmaceutical treatments have side effects, racism is not a known side effect of any Sanofi medication." (However, among the side effects Sanofi lists for Ambien are "abnormal thoughts and behavior." According to the Medication Guide sheet that accompanies the prescription drug, "Symptoms include more outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal, confusion, agitation, hallucinations")

Later that day, ABC canceled *Roseanne*, despite the fact that it was popular and earning a lot of money for the network. ABC president Channing Dungey said Barr's remark was "abhorrent, repugnant and inconsistent with our values."

Bee's offensive remarks were made on May 30 during the scripted opening monologue of her TBS show *Full Frontal*. President Trump's daughter Ivanka had posted a photo of herself with her son on Twitter, which occurred during a controversy about the administration's zero-tolerance practice at the border of separating children of illegal immigrants from their parents. There's no indication Ms. Trump intended the photo to have any connection with her father's policies.

Bee said, "Ivanka Trump, who works at the White House, chose to post the second most oblivious tweet we've seen this week." She went on to implore Ms. Trump to "do something about your dad's immigration practices, you feckless [vulgarity for female genitals]."

Bee added, "Put on something tight and low-cut and tell your father to [expletive] stop it."

Bee later tweeted, "I would like to sincerely apologize to Ivanka Trump and to my viewers for using an expletive on my show to describe her last night. It was inappropriate and inexcusable. I crossed a line, and I deeply regret it." She did not apologize for suggesting that Ms. Trump use incestual sexual attractiveness to try to persuade her father to change policy.

White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders condemned Bee, saying the language was "not fit for broadcast," labeling it "vile and vicious."

TBS also issued a statement. "Samantha Bee has taken the right action in apologizing for the vile and inappropriate language she used about Ivanka Trump last night," the network said. "Those words should not have been aired. It was our mistake too, and we regret it."

Both Autotrader and State Farm have dropped their sponsorship of Bee's show. Autotrader called her comments "offensive and unacceptable" and said they "do not reflect the views of our company."

People were quick to draw comparisons between Bee's remarks and Barr's tweet, noting that Bee is on the political left, and Barr, who has sometimes been harder to pigeonhole politically, is currently on the political right.

Some on the right have defended Barr's comments as free speech, though acknowledging that ABC is well within its right as a private company to cancel Barr's show. While drawing similar conclusions regarding the legality of Bee's words, some also want TBS to exercise their right in removing Bee's show from their line-up.

Some on the left have defended Bee's remarks by arguing that there's a difference between a woman using a gendered insult against another woman, which is what Bee did, and a white person comparing black people to apes, which is what Barr did. Others pointed out that Barr used the same gendered vulgarity against Hillary Clinton in 2016 and faced little to no criticism from the right.

Still others said that the importance of the cause about which Bee was speaking -- the separation of immigrant children and parents -- overrides the offensiveness of her name-calling.

Many people, however, maintain that the coarseness of both women's remarks rendered their intentions null and void.

[Fox News](#) pointed out that Barr's remarks have handed Jarrett a platform to speak in support of liberal issues. Jarrett's name and advocacy comments now appear in a please-pledge-to-vote email distributed by Organizing for Action, a nonprofit political-action organization founded to advance the political agenda of former President Barack Obama.

[Slate](#) noted that with one word, Bee "ensured her righteous outrage about immigration would be drowned out."

[TownHall](#) argued that Bee's remarks have become an "in-kind contribution" in support of conservative issues, in that her comments are a surrender of any moral high ground for liberal causes.

It seems that both women have discovered how to ensure that many people won't listen to anything helpful they might have say.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[ABC Cancels 'Roseanne' After Its Star, Roseanne Barr, Went on a Vitriolic and Racist Twitter Rant. *Washington Post*](#)

[Samantha Bee Apologizes for Vulgar Remark About Ivanka Trump: 'I Crossed a Line.' *CNN*](#)
[Roseanne Sobbed and Apologized About Racist Tweet in Unaired Interview With Rabbi Shmuley Boteach. *JTA*](#)

The Big Questions

1. Are both women equally wrong? Is so, why? If not, why not? What are the differences, if any?
2. Should the words we speak, write, text or tweet even be a matter for personal concern as long as our heart is right with God? Explain your answer.
3. What role should forgiveness play regarding public toxic speech?
4. Are there any words Christians should never use in reference to others? Why? Give some examples.
5. When has an unpopular or unlikely voice, or even an offensive or profane one, helped you to discover some worthwhile insight?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Ephesians 4:29

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. (For context, read 4:25--5:2.)

In the context passage, Paul states some principles for how Christians should talk: "So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another" (v. 25.) And then the line quoted above.

In both statements, Paul was speaking directly about speech, but he made them in the context of one's attitude and spirit: "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (vv. 31-32).

Ephesians is addressed primarily to Gentiles who have left behind their worship of pagan gods and the ways of life associated with that to follow Jesus. At that point in the first century, Christianity was not a separate religion but was still a movement within Judaism among some Jews who accepted that Jesus was the Messiah promised by the Hebrew scriptures. That means that those Jews who followed Jesus came with all the instruction in holy living that Judaism provided. For example, when it came to the matter of avoiding evil talk, including "wrangling and slander," Jews were familiar with the rabbis' condemnation of what they called *leshon ha-ra'*, "the tongue of evil."

The Gentile converts to Christ, however, didn't have that background, and so Paul spoke to that in terms of specific actions, using imperatives: "[Put] away falsehood ... speak the truth ... Let no evil talk come out of your mouths ... Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander ... be kind to one another ... [forgive] one another."

Questions: What type of speech should characterize Christians? Why? In what way can we convey that we feel strongly about a subject without turning off our audience or betraying our Christian commitment?

Samantha Bee used a vulgar word that has seemed to overshadow her view of the practice of separating children from parents illegally crossing the border. Is the issue or the word more important? Should selected words offend people more than the ideas that the people espouse?

Matthew 12:36-37

I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (For context, read 12:33-37.)

James 1:26

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. (For context, read 1:26-27.)

Taken together, these verses should convince us that how we speak to others is no small matter in the Christian life.

Questions: What personal experience convinces you of the truth of these words from scripture? Why? Name an instance when you used a word carelessly and thoughtlessly, as compared to an incident when you may have used an offensive word deliberately.

Matthew 18:8

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. (For context, read 18:6-9.)

While we don't think Jesus meant these words to say that we should literally cut off our hand or foot because they can be used to help us sin, there is perhaps a literal application: *If your Twitter account makes it easy for you to stumble, cancel it and stay with forms of communication that give you more time to reflect before you hit "send."*

Question: To what else should this comment from Jesus literally apply?

Zephaniah 3:9, 13

At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. ... they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. (For context, read 3:8-13.)

Zephaniah prophesied in the southern Hebrew kingdom, Judah, probably around 625 B.C. His nation had already been threatened by the aggression of the Assyrians, who had overrun the northern Hebrew kingdom, Israel. But Zephaniah had a sense that a worse fate was soon to befall his people. In fact, it was not too many years later that the Babylonians rose to power, conquered Judah and forced many of its leading citizens into captivity in Babylon. Zephaniah understood this event yet to come to be God's judgment on the nation, and he called it "the day of the Lord."

But Zephaniah also envisioned something beyond that, and near the end of his prophecy, he speaks of a future restoration when the righteous people of all nations will populate a new

kingdom -- God's kingdom. That would be the place where, among other good things, God "will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord." What's more, the citizens of this kingdom of God fully come "shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths."

In other words, public speech in that kingdom will not only be truthful but will also be free of nasty and evil motives. In that time, speech will be used to help and bless rather than to hurt and bludgeon. In that time, changed, pure speech will be what unifies people.

Questions: What are the marks of "kingdom speech"? What do we need to do to practice it in our own lives? What are some kingdom words that build people up? What are some that might make people who disagree with us more open to hearing our views?

Psalm 19:14

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (No context necessary.)

This prayer comes at the end of Psalm 19, but in fact, it could function appropriately at the end of any of the psalms or, for that matter, as the closing to any prayer of ours. But it is more than an extended "amen." It is itself a full prayer that both our words and our intentions be acceptable to God. That is a sterling measure of how we should think and speak.

Questions: To what situation in your life do you need to apply this prayer? Do you rely on prayer to help guide your choice of words and phrases? Have you experienced a time when failing to pray led to ill-considered comments?

For Further Discussion

1. Respond to this from a TWW editorial team member: "The discussion of the Barr-Bee remarks is not likely to be helpful if it focuses primarily on deleting specific words from public speech, media and entertainment. While that is a worthwhile effort, it does not address the larger issue, that speech itself, even when not including particularly offensive words, is often used as a weapon to polarize audiences unnecessarily and to pulverize people with whom we disagree. This applies to politicians and social commentators, of course, but also to us."
2. Have you ever used a word, an image or a sentence that overshadowed the point you were trying to make? Would it unravel a sermon you were listening to if a vulgar term was included?
3. Think about times in your life when someone's words -- positive or negative -- impacted you. Did that change your relationship with the person who spoke those words? Did those experiences influence your speech when talking to others?
4. Many times, we are asked to evaluate others through surveys, giving us opportunity to provide feedback to help individuals or organizations improve services. Do you do this in Christian love or respond from a place of anger or frustration? Are you only inclined to respond when you are dissatisfied, or are you equally generous with positive comments?

5. Name public figures who use offensive language routinely. Name public figures who never seem to use such language. Does their usage or non-usage of such terms have an impact on their popularity, influence or stature?

Responding to the News

This would be a good time not just to critique public figures who use vile language but also to praise those whose language is civil and respectful. If you are regularly impressed by such language, call or email the speaker or writer to say thanks.

Prayer

O God, help us to hear the things you want us to hear even when they are clouded by imprecise language or words that cause us to dig in our heels. Let our speech be helpful and reflect well our commitment to Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Other News This Week

More Choose Cremation, Not Burial, When Making End-of-Life Decisions

In the News

Benjamin Franklin wrote in a 1789 letter that "in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Regardless of the excellent accomplishments and advances in medicine, the mortality rate for humans remains 100 percent. But the way people mark passage from this life varies over time and place.

Cremation rates in the United States surpassed traditional burials for the first time in 2016, according to industry records. The National Funeral Directors Association projects that by 2030, the bodies of seven of every 10 people who die in America will be cremated rather than buried.

"Cremation has become the new tradition," says Barbara Kemmis, executive director of the Cremation Association of North America. "It's a seismic shift in the [\$16 billion] profession," considering the fact that the cremation rate was under 10 percent in the United States in 1980.

Some factors driving the change in after-death practices include concern for their environmental impact and financial cost, less rigid religious beliefs, the greater geographic mobility of the populace and the appeal of simplicity.

In the 1800s, some believed cremation was more sanitary and environmentally friendly than burials, which were thought to spread germs and poison wells. Embalming a body for burial could create health risks for funeral workers and lead to toxic chemicals leaching into the environment, as well. But cremation by fire involves the use of fossil fuels and incineration of mercury and dental fillings, which can also create health hazards.

To minimize negative impact on the environment, some people now opt for natural or "green" burial without embalming, or alkaline hydrolysis (flameless, water-based or "green" cremation).

Economics play a role in the choices of some consumers. Cremation may be thousands of dollars cheaper than burial, which usually involves a casket, a cemetery plot or vault, a hearse, car service for the family to the gravesite, a headstone and embalming. Added features such as a public viewing, visitation or calling hours, and a memorial service can raise the cost of burial or cremation. About one quarter to one third of all cremations in this country are in the basic "direct cremation" category, with the remainder involving enhanced features.

Changing religious beliefs and practices mean that fewer people connect with after-death traditions such as a church memorial service followed by burial. According to a 2015 report from the Pew Research Center, 20 percent of American adults no longer follow the religion in which they were raised. Nearly 25 percent call themselves atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular." The Catholic Church, which historically opposed cremation, has become more accepting of the practice as well.

What's more, even when a traditional funeral with burial is arranged, many families find that attendance at the calling hours is significantly larger than at the funeral itself.

Fewer Americans are now tied to a single community from cradle to grave than in previous generations. Cremation can provide different options for mourners who live far from other mourners, hometowns or family plots. With cremation, mourners often can set the time and location of a memorial gathering in a flexible manner that better suits their needs and the wishes of the deceased. One crematory owner said that cremation allows for procrastination.

A man's grandchildren were speaking to him about his wishes regarding end-of-life issues. As they discussed options, he mentioned that his first wife was buried on the West Coast, and his second wife was buried in the central part of the country. His grandchildren observed that if he chose cremation, he could have some of his ashes buried next to each woman. The grandfather smiled and said, "So for the first time in my life, I can be in two places at once."

A TWW contributor said that when her father died, the family had a traditional memorial service and meal at a church, but no graveside service at the time. Because he had donated his body to science, there was no body to view. Over a period of several years, different members of the family honored their father's memory at various times and places.

A sister who was executrix of the will and had primary responsibility for care of their mother found it hard to grieve properly in the immediate aftermath of the father's death because of the stress of those added responsibilities. For her, receiving his cremains several months after the death, attending a service in which medical students expressed gratitude for those who had donated their bodies to science, choosing and designing a headstone and planting a shrub at the gravesite were all opportunities to process her grief over time.

Two other siblings met in Prague to scatter some of their father's ashes in the city of his birth. When their mother died three years after their father, the urn containing the rest of his ashes was

buried with her body in the family plot in Central New York, beside the church she attended as a child.

Roughly a third of the ashes of those who have been cremated are scattered, a third are buried and a third are stored in urns, at the home of a family member or friend, or in an urn vault in a public or private space.

"For a lot of people [cremation] feels more intimate and more personal than a big funeral," said Caroline Jones, a spokesperson for Co-op Funeralcare and Later Life Planning based in Manchester, England.

Whatever the method of dealing with human remains following a death, people have found it helpful to create or follow certain rituals or traditions and to preserve or acknowledge certain places as sacred where the dead are honored and remembered.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[David Bowie Helps Inspire Co-op 'No Frills' and 'No Mourners' Funerals in Scotland. *The Herald*](#)

[Cremation Is Now Outpacing Traditional Burial in the U.S. *Time*](#)

[Ashes to Ashes: The Growing Popularity of Cremation \(video\). *Time*](#)

[Funeral Traditions. *The Funeral Source*](#)

[At Life's End, More Families Choosing Cremation. *Ithaca Journal*](#)

The Big Questions

1. What practices or traditions surrounding death were typical in your family and community in the past? To what extent were those practices connected with religious beliefs?
2. How and why are practices and rituals surrounding death changing in your family or community? To what extent are those changes based on economics, the increased mobility of our populace, religious beliefs or other factors?
3. What do you hope will take place after your own death, in terms of what happens to your body and how people mark your passing? How is this reflected in any pre-arrangements you have made? How might what you envision differ from family and community traditions and rituals you have experienced?
4. Why do you think some people choose to utilize a funeral home rather than a local house of worship for a funeral or memorial service? What does the Christian faith offer people in mourning that is similar to what other traditions offer? What does the Christian faith offer that is different?
5. When discussing death or mortality, why do many people seem to prefer euphemisms such as "caskets" for coffins, a "funeral coach" for a hearse, a "funeral director" rather than an undertaker, "calling hours" rather than wakes, "a celebration of life" rather than a funeral, "the

body, the deceased, or the remains," instead of the corpse, "a memorial garden" rather than a graveyard, and "passed away" or "went home to be with the Lord" rather than died?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Genesis 49:29-31; 50:13

Then [Jacob] charged [his sons], saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors -- in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah ..." They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah ... which Abraham bought as a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. (For context, read 49:29-33; 50:1-14, 24-26.)

In Genesis 23:1-20 is the account of Abraham's purchase of a cave as a family burial site, thought to be near modern Hebron in Palestine. According to our calculations based on verse 15, the purchase price of 400 silver shekels would have been in the neighborhood of \$41,600 in today's money.

Each subsequent generation used the family plot as a burial site. When Jacob gave this charge to his sons, they were about 250 miles away in Egypt. But Jacob did not want his bones left in Egypt (Genesis 47:29-31).

When Jacob died, his son Joseph had his physicians embalm his body, a process that took 40 days. The Egyptians mourned for Jacob for 70 days (Genesis 50:1-3). Then Jacob's sons carried his body to the burial place that was sacred to the family and buried him in the tomb Jacob "hewed out for [himself]" (Genesis 50:5). The family mourned for seven days with "a very great and sorrowful lamentation" (Genesis 50:10), and afterward, they returned to Egypt to resume their daily life (Genesis 50:14).

Later, when Joseph neared death, he made the Israelites promise not to leave his bones in Egypt when they left, but to take them with them to the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 50:24-26). Moses did carry Joseph's bones back to Canaan 400 years later when he led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32).

Questions: Why was it so important for each generation of Abraham's family to return to the ancestral burial site? What is the significance of sacred places for honoring the dead?

Do you have a family plot or a particular cemetery that you use? Are the remains of your family members scattered across great distances? Do you visit cemeteries regularly? Why or why not?

Deuteronomy 34:5-6, 8

Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial

place to this day. ... The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. (For context, read 34:5-8.)

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years, but was not to enter the promised land. As the Israelites had mourned for Moses' brother Aaron for 30 days, so they mourned for Moses for a month, before the official period of mourning concluded.

Questions: What is the significance of the fact that no one knows where Moses' burial place is? Was the memory of Moses any less honored for lack of a known burial plot?

How might the manner of Moses' burial be more like cremation than were the burial practices mentioned in the previous texts from Genesis?

What is the value of having a specific period of official mourning? What are the limitations of a specific mourning period?

Ruth 1:17

*Where you die, I will die --
there will I be buried.*

*May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,*

if even death parts me from you! (For context, read 1:14-18.)

Often these words are romanticized and quoted in the context of a wedding ceremony, but originally they were spoken by Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth, a Moabite, after both women had been widowed in Moab.

Naomi had decided to return to her home in Bethlehem, and Ruth was determined to accompany her: to share whatever fate might befall the older woman; to become part of her people and serve her God; to live, die and be buried alongside her.

Another daughter-in-law, Orpah, who had also been widowed, walked along with Naomi to a point but decided to return to her own people, at Naomi's suggestion. But Ruth pledged to stay by Naomi's side, even in death!

Questions: What made the difference between how the two daughters-in-law handled their grief? How do you think Ruth's words and actions affected Naomi? What is the significance of sharing a burial plot?

Matthew 28:8-10

So [the women] left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." (For context, read 28:1-10.)

Three days after Jesus' death and burial, Mary Magdalene and another Mary visited the tomb where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had laid Jesus' body. There was a great earthquake when an angel of the Lord came and rolled back the stone that blocked entry into the tomb. The soldiers guarding the entrance shook with fear "and became like dead men" (v. 4).

But the same angel that brought the men such terror brought to the women a message of confidence, hope and joy: "Do not be afraid!" he said to them. "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified" (v. 5). The angel acknowledged the reality of Jesus' death and invited the women to look at the place where his body had lain. His death was not some bad dream or an illusion; it had really happened, but he had been raised from the dead, just as he had said he would be (v. 6).

The women were then commissioned to quickly go tell Jesus' disciples that Jesus was alive and would meet them in Galilee (v. 7). As the women accepted their commission "with fear and great joy" (v. 8), Jesus appeared before them.

Questions: Why does the message of Jesus' resurrection strike fear in the hearts of some and bring joy to the hearts of others?

Why was it important for the women to view the tomb for themselves? How does their experience compare with our own, when we are faced with the death of those we love or with our own mortality?

Why does Jesus reiterate the message "Do not be afraid!" to the women?

When has Jesus met you with a message of encouragement and joy in the midst of your own grief? What does he invite you to do with your grief?

1 John 3:14, 16

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. ... We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us -- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. (For context, read 3:14-18.)

In this passage, we learn that loving each other is evidence that we are really alive, that we "have passed from death to life," or been raised from death to life. And we know whether we truly love each other by our willingness to lay down our lives for one another, just as Jesus laid down his life for us.

John makes it clear in the next verses that this kind of sacrificial love doesn't only appear in the literal self-sacrifice of one person to save another's life, but also in the smallest practical act of kindness and service to help a brother or sister in need. When we love like that, we truly come alive!

Questions: Share about a time when you received sacrificial love from someone. How did that impact you?

What opportunities do you have on a daily basis to "lay down your life for someone"? How does loving others bring new life to you, even at times when you feel "dead" or "dying" inside?

For Further Discussion

1. Writer Kate Torgovnick May stated on TED.com: "In Ghana, people aspire to be buried in coffins that represent their work or something they loved in life. These so-called 'fantasy coffins' were recently popularized by BuzzFeed, which showed images of 29 outrageous ones, from a coffin shaped like a Mercedes-Benz for a businessman to an oversized fish for a fisherman to a really big Bible for someone who loved going to church."

If you could select a "fantasy coffin" in which to be buried, what would you choose, and why?

2. Grief counselor Tony Del Persio of Bradshaw Funeral & Cremation Services in Stillwater, Minnesota, recalled what different people did with the cremains of someone who had died: Some scattered ashes off a roller coaster at Disneyland; some created a shrine; some sent cremains into space so they would have a unique memorial when the cremains returned to earth; some took the urn containing the ashes for a ride in a car; some have even put the urn next to them in bed and bid the deceased person good night, creating "a false reality." Del Persio said that cremation permits people to grieve at their own pace. Some people find that doing something tangible with the cremains helps them process their grief so they can let go of the person who has died.

When does healthy grief turn into something morbid, obsessive and unhealthy? How can the church help those who find themselves stuck in toxic grief patterns?

3. Some have been inspired by the no-frills, no-fuss, no-fans, no-fanfare after-death practices requested by music legend David Bowie, who died of liver cancer in 2016. His will specified that his body be cremated and his ashes scattered across Indonesia, in accordance with Buddhist rituals. Bowie chose not to have a memorial service with any family or friends in attendance. Instead, he found other ways to make a final statement to the world. The last of his 25 albums, *Blackstar*, features a cut-out star on the cover that exposes the vinyl version. "The fact that you can see the record as a physical thing that degrades, it gets scratched as soon as it comes into being, that is a comment on mortality," commented Jonathan Barnbrook, who designed the sleeve.

If you were to create an experience to express your "last words" to the world, what would you do, and what would you want to communicate?

4. By moving our burial grounds away from our worship centers, have we fractured the fellowship of the faithful? How important is it that after-death rituals be conducted in the context of a faith community? What is lost and what is gained when those memorials are moved to a non-religious setting?

5. Reflect on this, from a TWW team member: "An elderly woman in one parish I served years ago found that she couldn't return to church for a couple of years after the death of her beloved husband, because she couldn't get past the memory of the last time she saw him, in a casket at the front of the sanctuary. She couldn't hear the sermon, the choral anthem (he had sung in the choir), the hymns or prayers, because merely being in the space where his body had been brought

back the enormity of her grief and traumatized her. It took a lot of hard work and sensitive pastoral care to help her heal and move forward."

6. Comment on this, from TWW team member Malia Miller: "A pastor's wife from our community died several years ago after a long and difficult battle with cancer.

"Knowing it would be a difficult day for her family and friends, she asked that a song be played at the conclusion of her funeral as the guests were leaving the service. That song was the gospel tune entitled 'This Ole House' that includes the lines 'ain't gonna need this house no longer, ain't gonna need this house no more ... I'm gettin' ready to meet the saints!'

"Those who attended said this put a smile on their faces and reminded them that her suffering was over. Even in her exit from her earthly life, she controlled the narrative of the day. What a powerful evangelistic footnote to her legacy!"

7. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was born in Epworth, England, where his father, Samuel, was the priest at the local Anglican church. As an adult, John, too, became an Anglican priest, and he had a heartwarming encounter with God that made him an ardent evangelist. He preached that people ought to embrace their Christianity with enthusiasm.

One Sunday John's travels took him near his hometown, so he offered his services to the priest then serving the Epworth parish, to either preach or read the prayers of the day. The Epworth pastor not only spurned the offer, but proceeded to preach a sermon on the dangers of enthusiasm.

John's father was buried in the graveyard that adjoined the church. His tomb was a stone vault that rose about three feet above the surface of the ground. So that evening, John climbed up on his father's tombstone and preached to the gathered crowd about joy and peace through the Holy Spirit. John had discovered the good news that God's love in Christ triumphed over death!

We suspect John's father would have been pleased to help his son in this way. And for us, too, there is the sense that we are at one in faith with those who have gone before us.

Responding to the News

1. This might be a good time to think about what after-death traditions you want to embrace or create for yourself or your loved ones. How will your faith help shape your choices about these matters?

2. You might enjoy listening to ["The Borrowed Tomb"](#) by The Kingdom Heirs as you remember how Jesus has triumphed over the grave.

3. You may wish to explore the following book and article suggestions from TWW team members on the subject of death and death practices:

[*"Why Jews Put Stones on Graves." My Jewish Learning*](#)

[*Accompany Them With Singing: The Christian Funeral*, by Tom Long](#)

[*Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: And Other Lessons from the Crematory*, by Caitlin Doughty](#)

[*From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death*, by Caitlin Doughty](#)

Prayer (Suggested by Matthew 22:31-32 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13)

God of life and love, God of the living and God of us all, quicken us by your Spirit, that we may live in love as Christ did. When we grieve, help us not to do so as those who have no hope, but as those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that conquers death for all who put their trust in him. Amen.

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Attachments area

Preview YouTube video The Borrowed Tomb

