

INTRODUCTION.

- A. My topic for this hour is "Comforting the Bereaved." Much of what I have to say will be practical in nature. Since the topic of the Lectureship is that of "Christian Service" the more I can give you of what should and should not be done during the time of bereavement is appropriate.
- B. It is essential that we show concern and give aid to those who suffer from the death of a loved one. Notice that James says we serve, "in their distress" (Jas. 1:27).
- C. But sometimes it is during the time of death that many do not know what to do or what to say. Unfortunately, some who do not know what to do, do nothing, and this should not be!

I. POSITIVE VIEWS OF DEATH.

- A. The Bible speaks of death and dying and in many passages speaks in a positive way. When we think of a child of God dying we can think of many good things of which the Bible tells us.
- B. Some passages on death and dying are:
 - 1. Man is appointed to die one time (Heb. 9:27).
 - 2. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed by X (1Cor. 15:26).
 - 3. The day of one's death can be better than the day of birth (Eccl. 7:1).
 - 4. Precious in God's sight is the death of His saints (Psa. 116:15).
 - 5. To live is X, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21).
 - 6. Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13).
- C. God takes no pleasure in their death of the unrighteous (Ezek. 33:11) because the sting of death is sin (1Cor. 15:56).
- D. Let's talk about four things that can be done when one suffers from bereavement:
 - 1. The food.
 - 2. The funeral.
 - 3. The fellowship (including visitation).
 - 4. The follow-up.

II. THE FOOD.

- A. As is customary in this part of the country, the widow or widower and family is brought food, and usually enough to last through the day or day after the funeral.
- B. Some places have a funeral dinner in the church building fellowship hall in place of bringing food to the house.
- C. If food is brought to the house let's think of doing the following:
 - 1. Have a person there (friend of the family) to coordinate the dishes as they arrive. Have them record the name, address and phone number of those who brought food (this helps with thank-yous later).
 - 2. This person can also help with the flowers that will be brought to the house, he/she can make records of these too.
 - 3. If possible, have the name of this person announced at the worship services so that others can call and see what kinds of dishes are lacking and what would be of best help (sometimes disposable plates, cups, silverware, coffee, etc. are overlooked).
- D. When it comes to flowers, the elders should have a policy as to who is sent flowers and what kinds of arrangements (cost wise) should be given. A particular person can be put in charge of this task and he/she could also do this for those who enter the hospital. Elders will want to put flowers in their yearly budget to help with expenses to the congregation.
- E. When a meal (funeral dinner) is to be served by the congregation after the funeral:
 - 1. Have a funeral dinner committee(s) with two ladies as head.

2. Let them call the family to find out how many will be attending the dinner (encourage all of the family to attend).
 3. Have at least 10 people on the committee, this will allow 2 per food group (meats, vegetables, breads and drinks, fruits, and desserts).
 4. In a situation like this it is good for the church to provide the table service.
- F. Finally, when food is brought to the home or food is provided at the church building one thing that relieves a burden on the family is to have someone return the dishes or if you took a dish to the house go yourself to pick it up, this will allow time to visit.

III. THE FUNERAL (INCLUDING VISITATION).

- A. Traditions vary as to what is done at the funerals. One must always strive to please the family by respecting their wishes.
- B. If a visitation the night before the funeral is desired some things that can be done are:
 1. Have a baby sitting available for young children; the family may wish to take their children to the funeral early and then have them go to the sitter.
 2. Clothing worn should be modest, keeping jewelry and make-up to a minimum. Young people should not show up in tennis shoes and T-shirt.
 3. What you say and what you don't say at the visitation is all important:
 - a. Express sympathies.
 - b. Talk about the deceased in a good way.
 - c. Tell the family how nice they look.
 - d. Don't overspend your time, others are waiting.
 - e. Don't tell them you know how they feel, if you don't.
 - f. Don't discuss your problems at all.
 - g. Don't say "how you doing?" They're doing terrible!
 4. Preachers and elders should be visible and present throughout much of the service; people look to these individuals for strength.
- C. During the funeral one can and should;
 1. Have someone sit at the house to guard against theft.
 2. A baby-sitter(s) available to take care of young people.
 3. If the funeral service is at the building:
 - a. Building is in order inside and outside with restrooms cleaned.
 - b. Make sure heat/AC is on, lights and P.A. system are working.
 - c. Work with funeral home in their set-up.
 4. If funeral service is at the funeral home:
 - a. Singers--be sure all know where and when.
 - b. Don't be late, the funeral will start on time.
 - c. Take time to go out to the graveside, if possible.
- D. The preacher should do three things in his funeral sermon:
 1. Encourage the weak, bereaved, and grieved.
 2. Eulogize the deceased.
 3. Briefly, evangelize the audience.

IV. THE FELLOWSHIP.

- A. The family will need encouragement in the days and weeks following the funeral. One's responsibility to the bereaved only begins at the time of the visitation and funeral.
- B. Keep phone calls to a minimum, send cards with short notes in them.

- C. Make a visit to the home about every other week. Don't be afraid to ask questions about who's mowing the lawn; did the funeral home arrangements go correctly; do you need any help around the house, etc.?
- D. Keep visits short but long enough to help the widowed to feel relief from their grief.
- E. Deal in reality, talk of the future positively, talk about the deceased in positive ways.
- F. Pray for the family.

V. THE FOLLOW-UP.

- A. There are many things that can be done to help the family realize that their lost one is just as special in your eyes, as theirs.
- B. Some are:
 - 1. Gather pictures of the deceased and give to family.
 - 2. Start a memorial funds at the church or places of business.
 - 3. Dedicate libraries, fellowship halls, etc., in the memory of the deceased.
 - 4. Plant trees, and make memorial plaques.
 - 5. Make donations to charitable organizations in memory of the deceased.
- C. And plan some activities in honor of the deceased. The widow(er) may not want to get out of the house very soon, but when they do have some parties, fellowships, etc., and be sure someone invites them to come.

CONCLUSION.

- A. During the time of death is a time that the church must be willing to serve.
- B. Let us never "get used to death" and treat it lightly. May we always be tender and sympathetic to those who suffer.
- C. By this lesson may we better learn how to comfort widows in their distress, and be able to mourn with those who mourn.