

When you don't know what to say

You want to say something and everything sounds wrong. Good. That instinct is correct; most of what people say in these moments is wrong. Here are three passages that ask nothing of the person, and three sentences that are honest. Say one. Then be quiet.

THREE PASSAGES

Psalms 34:18

“Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit.”

John 11:35

“Jesus wept.”

Isaiah 43:2

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you.”

WHAT TO SAY

- “I don't have anything wise to say. I just wanted to be here.”
- “I'm not going to ask how you are. I'm going to bring dinner Tuesday.”
- “I keep thinking about [name].”

HOW TO USE THIS

Pick one passage and one sentence. That is a complete visit.

Scripture for someone who is grieving

The funeral is over, the casseroles have stopped, and the house is quiet for the first time. This is the stretch nobody prepares you for, and the stretch where a friend who shows up matters most. These passages are for then. Pick one. Read it slowly. You don't need to explain it.

FOR THE FIRST WEEKS

Psalm 34:18

"Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit."

Near to the brokenhearted. It asks nothing of the person but being broken, which is where they are.

John 11:35

"Jesus wept."

Jesus wept at a tomb he was about to empty. Grief is not a failure of faith; it is the right response to loss.

Matthew 5:4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Blessed are those who mourn. Jesus doesn't tell them to stop, and he doesn't say when the comfort comes.

FOR THE MORNINGS

Lamentations 3:22-23

"It is because of Yahweh's loving kindnesses that we are not consumed, because his compassion doesn't fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness."

New every morning, written in a burned city. Not a promise the day will be good; a promise you weren't abandoned in the night.

Psalm 30:5

"For his anger is but for a moment. His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes in the morning."

Weeping may stay for the night. The night can be long. Someone who has been through one says it ends.

FOR LATER, WHEN THEY ARE READY

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

The God of all comfort, from a man who needed comforting and got it. Eventually, their grief will be what someone else needs. Not yet.

Revelation 21:4

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

Every tear wiped away. Offer it once, quietly, and let them decide when.

WHAT TO SAY

- "I don't have anything wise to say. I loved her too."
- Say the name. People in grief say the worst part is when everyone stops saying it.
- "I'm dropping dinner on the porch Tuesday. No need to answer the door."
- In three weeks, when it's quietest, send one line: "Thinking of you today. No reason."

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- × "Everything happens for a reason." Not in the Bible.
- × "She's in a better place." They want her here.
- × Anything that begins with "at least."
- × "Let me know if you need anything." They won't. Say what you'll do and when.

HOW TO USE THIS

Choose one passage and keep it for a month rather than reading all seven. If you're sending one, Psalm 34:18 and one honest sentence is enough. Romans 8:28 is true and it is the wrong verse for fresh grief; save it for the one-year mark.

Scripture for the hospital room

Eight passages that hold up at a bedside, and a few words to say with them. Read one. Then stop. Presence matters more than words.

BEFORE SURGERY

Isaiah 41:10

“Don’t you be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Five promises in one verse, said to people who had every reason to be afraid. The last one is a hand.

Exodus 33:14

“He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

God’s answer to Moses when Moses was afraid to go forward without him. The presence goes in with you.

Psalms 4:8

“In peace I will both lay myself down and sleep, for you, Yahweh alone, make me live in safety.”

For the night before. Sleep is possible because someone else is on watch.

WAITING FOR NEWS

Psalms 112:7

“He will not be afraid of evil news. His heart is steadfast, trusting in Yahweh.”

A heart steady before the result, not after it.

Philippians 4:6-7

“In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”

Not a feeling but a practice: each worry turned into a request, with thanks. The peace stands guard.

A LONG STAY

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

For the patient and for the exhausted family in the chair. The rest on offer is a burden that fits.

Psalms 23:1-4

“Yahweh is my shepherd: I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Confident because of the shepherd, not because the road is safe.

WHEN THERE ARE NO WORDS

Psalms 34:18

“Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit.”

Near to the brokenhearted. It asks nothing of the person but being broken. Read it and sit down.

WHAT TO SAY

- Arriving: “I don’t have anything wise to say. I just wanted to be here.”
- Offering a verse: “Can I read you something short? You don’t have to say anything back.”
- Leaving: “I’ll be back Thursday. You don’t need to remember that; I will.”

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- × “Everything happens for a reason.” “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” Neither is in the Bible, and both put the weight back on the person in the bed.

HOW TO USE THIS

Read one. Then stop. Presence matters more than words.

Scripture for waiting on test results

Nothing to do, no news, every phone call a possible verdict. Waiting is its own kind of hard, and most verses people send are secretly about the news being good. These five are not. They are for the person by the phone, and they were written by people who then got the news, good and bad. Fold this and keep it in a pocket.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

Habakkuk 3:17-18

“For though the fig tree doesn’t flourish, nor fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive fails, the fields yield no food; the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in Yahweh. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!”

Though the fig tree doesn’t flourish, yet I will rejoice. The Bible’s clearest trust that doesn’t depend on the news being good. Say it before the call, so it’s already said.

Psalms 4:8

“In peace I will both lay myself down and sleep, for you, Yahweh alone, make me live in safety.”

For sleep. Someone else is on watch.

THE MORNING OF

Psalms 112:7

“He will not be afraid of evil news. His heart is steadfast, trusting in Yahweh.”

A heart steady before the news, not after it. The only steadiness available while the phone hasn’t rung.

Isaiah 41:10

“Don’t you be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Five promises, and a hand. The verse doesn’t describe the news. It describes the company.

EVERY TIME THE MIND RUNS AHEAD

Matthew 6:34

“Therefore don’t be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day’s own evil is sufficient.”

Tomorrow will worry about itself. Today, the whole assignment is waiting. That is enough.

WHAT TO SAY

- “I know you’re waiting. I’m not going to ask. I’m just here.”
- “Whatever it is, you won’t hear it alone. Call me right after.”
- Offer to sit with them the night before, or to be there when the call comes.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- × “I’m sure it’s nothing.” You don’t know that, and they know you don’t.

HOW TO USE THIS

Pick one for the night before and one for the morning. Say them out loud. When the mind runs to tomorrow, name today’s one task, which is waiting, and come back to it. It’s a practice, not a switch.

What to read when someone is dying

At a bedside you need verses that are short, plain, and true, because the person may be drifting and you will be reading through your own tears. These are the ones hospice chaplains reach for. None of them argues. They say: you are held, you are going somewhere, and you are not going alone. Read one, slowly. Then sit. The sitting is most of it.

FOR THE ROOM

Psalm 23:1-6

“Yahweh is my shepherd: I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in Yahweh’s house forever.”

The person has probably known it their whole life, and hearing it now connects the end to everything before. It names the valley and walks through it.

Isaiah 43:2

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you.”

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When, not if. Honest about the crossing.

FOR THE PERSON

Luke 23:43

“Jesus said to him, “Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Jesus, dying, to the man dying next to him: today. The shortest, clearest promise in the Bible about what comes next, made to someone with nothing left to offer.

Psalm 31:5

“Into your hand I commend my spirit. You redeem me, Yahweh, God of truth.”

“Into your hand I commend my spirit.” Jesus said it on the cross. If the person can still speak, they may want to say it. If not, say it for them.

John 14:1-3

“Don’t let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many homes. If it weren’t so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.”

A prepared place, and someone coming back to get you.
From the one who went first.

FOR THE FAMILY, AFTERWARD

Psalm 116:15

“Precious in Yahweh’s sight is the death of his saints.”

Precious in his sight. One line, for when nobody knows what to say.

WHAT TO SAY

- Say less. One verse, slowly. Then hold a hand.
- “You can go when you’re ready. We’ll be all right.” Families often need to give permission, and the dying often wait for it.
- Say what they meant to you, in the present tense, while they can hear it. Hearing is usually the last sense to go.
- Play the music they loved. Read the psalm they knew. Familiar beats profound now.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- ✗ “Fight this.” Late in dying, it becomes one more thing they are failing at.

HOW TO USE THIS

Bring two verses, not seven. Psalm 23 for the room, Luke 23:43 or Psalm 31:5 for the person. If you don’t know what they believed, Psalm 23 and Isaiah 43:2 ask nothing of the listener.

Scripture for caregivers

Caregiving is love with a schedule, and it goes on longer than anyone plans for. The person you care for gets the visitors and the prayers; you get the pharmacy run. These passages are for you, the one in the chair. They don't ask you to be stronger. They say who is carrying you while you carry someone else.

WHEN YOU ARE WORN OUT

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Come to me, all who labor and are heavily burdened. Then a yoke, which is a tool for work. Not less to carry; a way of carrying it with someone gentle.

Isaiah 40:29-31

“He gives power to the weak. He increases the strength of him who has no might. Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall; but those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and not be weary. They will walk, and not faint.”

He gives power to the weak. The order of the images matters: eagle, then running, then walking without fainting. Most of caregiving is the walking. That, too, is renewed strength.

Psalms 73:26

“My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

My flesh and my heart fail. The psalm allows the failing. Something holds underneath it.

WHEN YOU FEEL INVISIBLE

Colossians 3:23-24

“And whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord. Written to people whose work nobody honored. Yours is seen.

Matthew 25:40

“The King will answer them, ‘Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”

“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.” The pharmacy run counts.

WHEN YOU RESENT IT, AND THEN FEEL GUILTY

Psalms 34:18

“Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit.”

Near to the brokenhearted, and the crushed. Resentment and exhaustion are not failures; they are what crushing feels like. The nearness comes anyway.

Galatians 6:9

“Let's not be weary in doing good, for we will reap in due season, if we don't give up.”

Let's not be weary in doing good. Paul names the weariness first. He doesn't pretend it away.

WHAT TO SAY

- To yourself: “I can be tired and still be doing this well.”
- To a caregiver you know: “What can I take off your plate this week?” Then take it. Not “let me know.”
- “Go home and sleep. I'll sit with her tonight.” The single most useful sentence a friend can say.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- × To a caregiver: “You're a saint.” It closes the door on them ever admitting it's hard.

HOW TO USE THIS

Tape one of these to the dashboard or the pill organizer. Psalm 73:26 for the bad days. Matthew 25:40 for the invisible ones. And please, accept the help when it's offered; letting someone sit with your mother for an evening is not a failure of love.

For tonight, when you can't sleep

It's late and your mind won't stop. You don't need an explanation right now; you need something short and true to read instead of the ceiling. Five passages. Read one. Read it again. Put the phone down.

FIVE PASSAGES

Psalm 4:8

"In peace I will both lay myself down and sleep, for you, Yahweh alone, make me live in safety."

Psalm 121:3-4

"He will not allow your foot to be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

Matthew 11:28

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."

Isaiah 26:3

"You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in you."

Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth."

HOW TO USE THIS

Keep this on the nightstand. If the nights keep coming, the page for when you can't sleep has more, and a doctor has more than that.

Scripture for funerals, by situation

A funeral is not the place to discover a passage doesn't fit. These are grouped by the situation you are actually walking into, with a line on why each one works there and where it can go wrong. All text is from the World English Bible and can be copied straight into an order of service.

ALMOST ANY FUNERAL

Passages that hold up regardless of the circumstances. If you have time to read only one, Psalm 23 whole.

Psalm 23:1-6

"Yahweh is my shepherd: I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in Yahweh's house forever."

Confident because of the shepherd, not because the road is safe. It names the valley of the shadow of death without flinching, which is why it is read so often.

John 14:1-3

"Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also."

Jesus, the night before his own death, telling frightened friends there is a prepared place. Read it as a promise from someone who has been through the door.

Revelation 21:4

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

The last page of the story. Best read near the end of the service, after the grief has been given room, not as a way to skip it.

Romans 8:38-39

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul's list of everything that cannot separate us from God's love begins with death. Sturdy, and works for families with mixed beliefs because it makes no demands of the listener.

SUDDEN OR TRAUMATIC DEATH

Avoid anything that hints at explanation or purpose. The room needs presence, not reasons.

Psalm 34:18

"Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit."

Nearness to the brokenhearted, promised without conditions. Written by David after a humiliating day, which is why it sounds like it was written from the floor.

John 11:35

"Jesus wept."

Jesus wept at a tomb he was about to empty. Two words that give the whole room permission to grieve without apology.

Psalm 46:1-3

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we won't be afraid, though the earth changes, though the mountains are shaken into the heart of the seas; though its waters roar and are troubled, though the mountains tremble with their swelling."

A psalm for when the earth gives way. It doesn't say the earth won't; it says where the refuge is while it does.

Lamentations 3:22-23

"It is because of Yahweh's loving kindnesses that we are not consumed, because his compassion doesn't fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness."

Mercy new every morning, written in a burned city. Honest enough for a funeral where nothing makes sense yet.

AFTER A LONG ILLNESS

The family has often been grieving for months. Rest and completion are the themes that land.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing."

A course finished and a faith kept. Right for someone who endured well; use with care if the illness stripped the person of the capacity to 'fight.'

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Rest for the heavily burdened. Fits the person who has died and the caregivers who are exhausted in the front row.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

"Therefore we don't faint, but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory, while we don't look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

The outer person wasting away while the inner is renewed. Paul's own words about a body giving out, without pretending it isn't.

Psalms 116:15

"Precious in Yahweh's sight is the death of his saints."

'Precious in Yahweh's sight is the death of his saints.' One line, and it says the death was noticed and valued, not merely permitted.

A CHILD OR INFANT

Say less. Choose one passage and read it slowly. Do not explain.

Mark 10:13-16

"They were bringing to him little children, that he should touch them, but the disciples rebuked those who were bringing them. But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said to them, 'Allow the little children to come to me! Don't forbid them, for God's Kingdom belongs to such as these. Most certainly I tell you, whoever will not receive God's Kingdom like a little child, he will in no way enter into it.' He took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands on them."

Jesus taking children in his arms and blessing them, over the disciples' objection. Read it without comment.

2 Samuel 12:22-23

"He said, 'While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether Yahweh will not be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.'"

David after the death of his infant son: 'I will go to him, but he will not return to me.' Grief and hope in one sentence, from a father.

Psalms 139:13-16

"For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them."

Formed in the womb, every day written before one of them came to be. It says the short life was known and whole.

Isaiah 40:11

"He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom. He will gently lead those who have their young."

The shepherd gathering the lambs in his arms and carrying them close. An image, not an argument, which is what the day can bear.

AN ELDERLY BELIEVER

A long life of faith deserves passages that honor it as a course completed.

Psalm 90:10-12

“The days of our years are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty years; yet their pride is but labor and sorrow, for it passes quickly, and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger, your wrath according to the fear that is due to you? So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Moses on the length of a life and the wisdom of counting days. Fitting for someone who counted theirs well.

Psalm 92:12-15

“The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree. He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in Yahweh’s house. They will flourish in our God’s courts. They will still produce fruit in old age. They will be full of sap and green, to show that Yahweh is upright. He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”

Still bearing fruit in old age, ‘full of sap and green.’ For someone who kept going.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

“I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.”

The finished race. Nearly always right for a faithful elder.

Isaiah 46:4

“Even to old age I am he, and even to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear. Yes, I will carry, and will deliver.”

‘Even to old age I am he, and even to gray hairs I will carry you.’ A promise kept to the end; read it as fulfilled.

WHEN THE PERSON’S FAITH IS UNKNOWN, OR THE FAMILY’S IS

Choose passages that comfort without requiring the listener to affirm anything. Let the text do its own work.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”

A time to be born and a time to die. Recognizable to almost everyone, honest about mortality, and it asks nothing of the hearer.

Psalm 103:13-17

“Like a father has compassion on his children, so Yahweh has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are made. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone. Its place remembers it no more. But Yahweh’s loving kindness is from everlasting to everlasting with those who fear him, his righteousness to children’s children,”

‘As a father has compassion on his children.’ Frailty and mercy together; the ‘dust’ line is unusually honest for a funeral.

Matthew 5:4

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Blessed are those who mourn. A single sentence that dignifies the grief in the room without preaching at it.

Romans 8:38-39

“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from God’s love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Read as a description of God’s disposition rather than a test of the listener’s.

AFTER A SUICIDE

Do not speculate about the person’s eternal state from the pulpit, in either direction. Speak to the living. Have a crisis line number available for the family and say so.

Psalm 34:18

“Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit.”

Nearness to the crushed in spirit. The most important verse for this room, and it applies to the person who died as much as to those who remain.

Psalm 88:1-3

“Yahweh, the God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before you. Let my prayer enter into your presence. Turn your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles. My life draws near to Sheol.”

The only psalm that ends in darkness. Reading it says the Bible knows what despair sounds like and kept it in the canon.

Romans 8:38-39

“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from God’s love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing, including death, separates from God’s love. Read it plainly and let it stand.

1 Kings 19:4-8

“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. Then he requested for himself that he might die, and said, “It is enough. Now, O Yahweh, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat!” He looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on the coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. Yahweh’s angel came again the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.” He arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, God’s Mountain.”

Elijah asking to die, and God’s answer: food, sleep, and a touch. A gentle passage for a family asking why they didn’t see it.

HOW TO USE THIS

Pick two or three passages, not six. Read them slowly. If a verse needs a paragraph of explanation to fit the situation, choose a different verse. For a graveside committal, Psalm 23 or John 14:1–3 alone is enough.