




A SELECTION OF SECULAR READINGS FOR FUNERALS



You might want to include a piece of poetry or prose in the ceremony that puts your feelings into words... or one that you know your loved one would appreciate. Reading out special song lyrics can work well too!



Readings can be a chance for a friend or family member to take an active part in the ceremony... or I can read a piece out on your behalf.

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My Funeral

I hope I can trust you, friends, not to use our relationship
As an excuse for an unsolicited ego-trip.
I have seen enough of them at funerals and they make me cross.
At this one, though deceased, I aim to be the boss.

If you are asked to talk about me for five minutes,
please do not go on for eight
There is a strict timetable at the crematorium, and nobody wants to be late.

If invited to read a poem, just read the bloody poem. If requested
To sing a song, just sing it, as suggested,
And don't say anything. Though I will not be there,
Glancing pointedly at my watch and fixing the speaker with a malevolent
stare.

Remember that this was how I always reacted
When I felt that anybody's speech, sermon or poetry reading was becoming
too protracted.
Yes, I was intolerant, and not always polite
And if there aren't many people at my funeral, it will serve me right.

Wendy Cope



The Dash

I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on the tombstone from the beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came the date of birth and spoke of the following date
with tears,
but he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time that they spent alive on earth.
And now only those who loved them know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own, the cars...the house...the cash.
What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.

So, think about this long and hard. Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough to consider what's true and real
and always try to understand the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger and show appreciation more
and love the people in our lives like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile,
remembering that this special dash might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read, with your life's actions to rehash...
would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent your dash?

Linda Ellis

She Is Gone

You can shed tears that she is gone
Or you can smile because she has lived

You can close your eyes and pray that she will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that she has left

Your heart can be empty because you can't see her
Or you can be full of the love that you shared

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday

You can remember her and only that she is gone
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on

You can cry and close your mind,
be empty and turn your back

Or you can do what she would want,
smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

David Harkins

Remember Me

Speak of me as you have always done.
Remember the good times, laughter and fun.

Share the happy memories we've made
Do not let them wither or fade.

I'll be with you in the summer's sun
And when the winter's chill has come.

I'll be the voice that whispers in the breeze.
I'm peaceful now, put your mind at ease.

I've rested my eyes and gone to sleep.
But memories we've shared are yours to keep.

Sometimes our final days may be a test.
But remember me when I was at my best.

Although things may not be the same.
Don't be afraid to use my name.

Let your sorrow last for just a while.
Comfort each other and try to smile.

I've lived a life filled with joy and fun.
Live on now, make me proud of what you'll become.

Anthony Dowson



Life is rather like a song

Life is rather like a song,
sometimes short, sometimes long,
At times it's happy, others sad,
So unpredictable, it makes you mad.

Set to music, it can be so sweet,
with a pleasing tempo or happy beat,
With the passion of youth, or the grace of age,
And you the star, in centre stage.

You hold the spotlight until you know;
the time has come for you to go,
An eerie time, "What have you done?"
You've sung your song; "Is the battle won?"

You made your mark, you showed your flair,
Only now you wonder, "Does anyone care?"
You gave your heart, and bared your soul.
"Was it really worth it, after all?"

Your life is only what you make it,
you offer love, others take it.
When your life is near conclusion,
Will you see a purpose? Or just confusion?

Life's a time for living, not for dying,
As long as there's hope, just keep on trying.
You'll find your goal, before it ends,
You'll find your love, and know your friends.

Terry Bennett

Do not stand at my grave and weep

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 sunlight 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 circled 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.

Mary Elizabeth Frye



Don't grieve for me

Don't grieve for me,
The universe lets nothing go,
There's nowhere else but
I am still here in your memories.

Just look for me
In sunlight flashing from a wave,
The feather touch of some night breeze,
Look up into the sky at night,
Out there, somewhere, I'm spread around
As real and insubstantial as a rainbow,
The scent of roses on a summer's day,
The sound of birdsong
Or the lazy hum of bees.
Look out to sea,
In the green depths I'm there
Or in the shape of breakers thundering home
Or in the high, flung spray
Or in the wind across a field of corn.
I'm in a laugh, a thought, a cry of pain, a dream.

Don't grieve for me.
You will find me
In your memory
Just wait and see.

Percy J Cullum

Your Mother is always with you.
She's the whisper of the leaves as you walk down the street.
She's the smell of certain foods you remember, flowers you pick,
the fragrance of life itself.
She's the cool hand on your brow when you're not feeling well.
She's your breath in the air on a cold winter's day.
She is the sound of the rain that lulls you to sleep, the colours of a
rainbow. She is Christmas morning.
Your Mother lives inside your laughter.
She's the place you came from, your first home,
and she's the map you follow with every step you take.
She's your first love, your first friend, even your first enemy,
but nothing on earth can separate you.
Not time, not space, not even death.

Anon

When I am dead

When I am dead
Cry for me a little
Think of me sometimes
But not too much.
Think of me now and again
As I was in life
At some moments it's pleasant to recall
But not for long.
Leave me in peace
And I shall leave you in peace
And while you live
Let your thoughts be with the living.



Traditional Indian Prayer

Warning

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me,
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the paper

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Jenny Joseph

Death is nothing at all.

Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away.
I am I and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other,
That, we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name.
Speak to me in the easy way
which you always used.
Put no difference into 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.
Let my name be ever the household word
that it always was.
Let it be spoken without effect.
Without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same that it ever was.
There is absolute unbroken continuity.
Why should I be out of mind
because I am out of sight?

All is well.

Henry Scott Holland (adapted)

What will Matter

Ready or not, some day it will all come to an end.
There will be no more sunrises, no minutes, hours or days.
All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten, will pass to someone else.

Your wealth, fame and temporal power will shrivel to irrelevance.
It will not matter what you owned or what you were owed.
Your grudges, resentments, frustrations and jealousies will finally disappear.

So too, your hopes, ambitions, plans and to-do lists will expire.
The wins and losses that once seemed so important will fade away.
It won't matter where you came from or what side of the tracks you lived on at the end.

It won't matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant.
Even your gender and skin colour will be irrelevant.
So what will matter?
How will the value of your days be measured?

What will matter is not what you bought,
but what you built; not what you got, but what you gave.
What will matter is not your success, but your significance.

What will matter is not what you learned, but what you taught.
What will matter is every act of integrity,
compassion, courage or sacrifice
that enriched, empowered or encouraged others
to emulate your example.

What will matter is not your competence,
but your character.
What will matter is not how many people you knew, but how many will feel a lasting loss when you're gone.
What will matter is not your memories, but the memories that live in those who loved you.
What will matter is how long you will be remembered,
by whom and for what.

Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident.
It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.
Choose to live a life that matters.

Michael Josephson

When I'm Gone

When I come to the end of my journey
And I travel my last weary mile
Just forget if you can, that I ever frowned
And remember only the smile

Forget unkind words I have spoken
Remember some good I have done
Forget that I ever had heartache
And remember I've had loads of fun

Forget that I've stumbled and blundered
And sometimes fell by the way
Remember I have fought some hard battles
And won, ere the close of the day

Then forget to grieve for my going
I would not have you sad for a day
But in summer just gather some flowers
And remember the place where I lay

And come in the shade of evening
When the sun paints the sky in the west
Stand for a few moments beside me
And remember only my best

Anon



The Journey of My Life

It was beautiful as long as it lasted,
the journey of my life.
I have no regrets whatsoever
save the pain I'll leave behind.

Those dear hearts who love and care
and the strings pulling at the heart and soul
The strong arms that held me up
when my own strength let me down.

At every turning of my life I came across good friends,
friends who stood by me
even when time raced by me.
Farewell, farewell my friend.

I smile and bid you goodbye.
No, shed no tears for I need them not.
All I need is your smile.
If you feel sad do think of me for that is what I'll like.

When you live in the hearts of those you love
remember then, you never die.

Anon



Let Me Go

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.

Christina Rosetti

Eulogy for a Physicist

You want a physicist to speak at your funeral. You want the physicist to talk to your grieving family about the conservation of energy, so they will understand that your energy has not died. You want the physicist to remind your sobbing mother about the first law of thermodynamics; that no energy gets created in the universe, and none is destroyed. You want your mother to know that all your energy, every vibration, every Btu of heat, every wave of every particle that was her beloved child remains with her in this world. You want the physicist to tell your weeping father that amid energies of the cosmos, you gave as good as you got.

And at one point you'd hope that the physicist would step down from the pulpit and walk to your brokenhearted spouse there in the pew and tell him that all the photons that ever bounced off your face, all the particles whose paths were interrupted by your smile, by the touch of your hair, hundreds of trillions of particles, have raced off like children, their ways forever changed by you. And as your widow rocks in the arms of a loving family, may the physicist let her know that all the photons that bounced from you were gathered in the particle detectors that are her eyes, that those photons created within her constellations of electromagnetically charged neurons whose energy will go on forever.

And the physicist will remind the congregation of how much of all our energy is given off as heat. There may be a few fanning themselves with their programs as he says it. And he will tell them that the warmth that flowed through you in life is still here, still part of all that we are, even as we who mourn continue the heat of our own lives.

And you'll want the physicist to explain to those who loved you that they need not have faith; indeed, they should not have faith. Let them know that they can measure, that scientists have measured precisely the conservation of energy and found it accurate, verifiable and consistent across space and time. You can hope your family will examine the evidence and satisfy themselves that the science is sound and that they'll be comforted to know your energy's still around. According to the law of the conservation of energy, not a bit of you is gone; you're just less orderly. Amen.

Aaron Freeman

i carry your heart with me

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)
i fear
no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you
here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

e e cummings



Satisfied Mind

How many times have you heard someone say
If I had money, I'd do things my way,
But little they know that it's so hard to find
One rich man with a satisfied mind.

Money can't buy back your youth when you're old
A friend, when you're lonely, or peace to your soul.
The wealthiest person is a pauper at times
Compared to the man with a satisfied mind.

When my life is over and my time has run out.
My friends and my loved ones, I'll leave them no doubt.
But, one thing's gone for certain, when it comes my time
I'll leave this old world with a satisfied mind.

Jeff Buckley

Shadow of the Day

I close both locks below the window
I close both blinds and turn away
Sometimes solutions aren't so simple
Sometimes goodbye's the only way.

And the sun will set for you
The sun will set for you
And the shadow of the day
Will embrace the world in gray.

And the sun will set for you
In cards and flowers on your window
Your friends all plead for you to stay
Sometimes beginnings aren't so simple
Sometimes goodbye's the only way.

And the sun will set for you
The sun will set for you
And the shadow of the day
Will embrace the world in gray

Lincoln Park

Pictures of You

I've been looking so long at these pictures of you
That I almost believe that they're real
I've been living so long with my pictures of you
That I almost believe that the pictures
Are all I can feel
Remembering you standing quiet in the rain
As I ran to your heart to be near
And we kissed as the sky fell in
Holding you close
How I always held close in your fear
Remembering you running soft through the night
You were bigger and brighter and wider than snow
And screamed at the make-believe
Screamed at the sky
And you finally found all your courage
To let it all go
Remembering you fallen into my arms
Crying for the death of your heart
You were stone white
So delicate
Lost in the cold
You were always so lost in the dark
Remembering you how you used to be
Slow drowned
You were angels
So much more than everything
Hold for the last time then slip away quietly
Open my eyes
But I never see anything
If only I'd thought of the right words
I could have held on to your heart
If only I'd thought of the right words
I wouldn't be breaking apart
All my pictures of you
Looking so long at these pictures of you
But I never hold on to your heart
Looking so long for the words to be true
But always just breaking apart
My pictures of you
There was nothing in the world
That I ever wanted more
Than to feel you deep in my heart
There was nothing in the world
That I ever wanted more
Than to never feel the breaking apart
All my pictures of you

The Cure

I'll Be Seeing You

I'll be seeing you
In all the old familiar places
That this heart of mine embraces
All day and through

In that small cafe
The park across the way
The children's carousel
The chestnut trees
The wishing well

I'll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day
In everything that's light and gay
I'll always think of you that way

I'll find you in the morning sun
And when the night is new
I'll be looking at the moon
But I'll be seeing you

I'll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day
In everything that's light and gay
I'll always think of you that way

I'll find you in the morning sun
And when the night is new
I'll be looking at the moon
But I'll be seeing you

Irving Kahal

**Billie Holiday's 1944 recording of the song was the final transmission sent by NASA to the Opportunity rover on Mars when its mission ended in February 2019.*

Gone Too Soon

Like a comet blazing across the evening sky,
Gone too soon.
Like a rainbow fading in the twinkling of an eye,
Gone too soon.

Shiny and sparkly, splendidly bright,
Here one day, gone one night.
Like the loss of sunlight on a cloudy afternoon,
Gone too soon.

Like a castle built upon a sandy beach,
Gone too soon.
Like a perfect flower that is just beyond your reach,
Gone too soon.

Born to amuse, to inspire, to delight,
Here one day, gone one night.
Like a sunset dying with the rising of the moon,
Gone too soon.

Shiny and sparkly and splendidly bright,
Here one day and gone one night.
Like a sunset dying with the rising of the moon,
Gone too soon.

*Larry Grossman and Buz Kohan
Performed by Micheal Jackson*



Nothing Compares to You

It's been seven hours and fifteen days
Since you took your love away
I go out every night and sleep all day
Since you took your love away
Since you been gone I can do whatever I want
I can see whomever I choose

I can eat my dinner in a fancy restaurant
But nothing can take away these blues
'Cause nothing compares
Nothing compares to you

It's been so lonely without you here
Like a bird without a song
Nothing can stop these lonely tears from falling
Tell me baby where did I go wrong
I could put my arms around every boy I see
But they'd only remind me of you

I went to the doctor guess what he told me
Guess what he told me
He said girl you better try to have fun no matter what you do
But he's a fool,
'Cause nothing compares
Nothing compares to you

All the flowers that you planted mama
In the back yard
All died when you went away
I know that living with you baby was sometimes hard
But I'm willing to give it another try

Nothing compares
Nothing compares to you

Prince
Performed by Sinead O'Connor

Stop All The Clocks

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

You are my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

You are my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought love would last for ever: I was wrong.

W H Auden

