

# Lessons from the House of Mourning

*by Bryan Gibson*

“A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth. Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4).

If you’ve ever been to the house of mourning, and did any sober reflection, you already know what this passage confirms—powerful and enduring lessons can be learned there. This won’t be an exhaustive list, but consider carefully these seven lessons.

**The house of mourning CAN become a house of rejoicing**—if the deceased, as far as we can tell, was a faithful Christian, if from all indications this person died in the Lord. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...that they may rest from their labors” (Revelation 14:13). “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). This explains how the day of one’s death can be better than the day of one’s birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1). It also explains how those left behind can be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10), why they don’t “sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57); thanks be to Him that “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

**Mourning CAN be very good for the soul**—“for by a sad countenance the heart is made better” (Ecclesiastes 7:3). Affliction, regardless of which form it takes, should sober us up—make us think more seriously about the Lord and our obligations to Him. “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word...it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Psalms 119:67, 71). “The end of ALL men” (Ecclesiastes 7:2) includes me, and if I’m not prepared for this “end,” it’s time to wake up and give the Lord His due. And tomorrow won’t do, because TODAY may just be my last day—my last chance to make things right with Him.

**Tender, receptive hearts can often be found in the house of mourning**—people doing the very kind of thinking we just described. For those devoted to the salvation of souls, this may be the open door for which we’ve been praying (1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:2). Non-Christians may begin to think seriously about obeying the gospel, and unfaithful Christians may be persuaded to turn back to the Lord. Let’s make sure, then, we do all we can to influence these tender hearts—preach the gospel to them, talk to them about eternal matters, answer any spiritual questions they may have, and set a good example before them. Eyes and ears will be wide open in the house of mourning—we dare not neglect this precious opportunity.

**Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs MAY become more meaningful than ever.** On such an occasion, it’s not too difficult for the spiritually minded to make melody in their hearts

(Ephesians 5:19), to sing with the spirit and understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15), and to sing with grace in their hearts (Colossians 3:16). The words in these songs, especially the words which describe our heavenly home, may very well capture our attention like they've never done before. "When shall I reach that happy place and be forever blest? When shall I see the Father's face, and in His bosom rest?" (*I Am Bound for the Promised Land*). Don't we just love to sing those words? Maybe, just maybe, this will make us sing with the same enthusiasm when we gather together with the saints in our weekly assemblies.

**ONE individual touches MANY lives**, and yes, that includes those we might describe as ordinary. Go to the visitation/funeral and listen to the comments—especially those made by people who had meaningful contact with the deceased. It's really amazing to hear all the different ways in which these people were impacted. Think, now, about all the people with whom YOU have meaningful contact—at home, at work, at school, in the various organizations/activities in which you may be involved, in your local church, etc. Of course, whatever influence you have on these people could very well extend to their circle of influence. Lots of folks are depending on YOU! Don't blow it. Influence these people, not just for good, but for eternity. Make a difference, and the best way to do that is to simply serve the Lord faithfully. There's nothing ordinary about folks who lead others to heaven.

**Evidence for God is abundant in the house of mourning.** You can hear it sometimes in what is said about the deceased—if that person was transformed by the "living and powerful" word of God (Hebrews 4:12). What that person became in Christ Jesus is a monument to the work and power of God (Ephesians 2:10; Romans 14:20). Evidence for God is further seen in the gestures of comfort, compassion, sympathy, and encouragement, which can often be overwhelming in number. This tremendous capacity for good is a powerful argument for the One who made everything good (Genesis 1:31), including man, whom God made in His very image (Genesis 1:27).

**Each and every gesture of kindness, compassion, comfort, tenderheartedness, sympathy, and encouragement is GREATLY appreciated.** Receivers know this already; let's make sure we remember it as givers. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all..." (Galatians 6:10). The house of mourning presents a great opportunity to do good, so let's make sure we offer all these wonderful gestures, and in so doing, "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).