

**April 22, 2019**

**By Dr. Stephen R. Graves**

## A TALE OF TWO FUNERALS

A few months back, two funerals occurred in the same week in our community. Both were for men I knew who had lived a long life and had great community reach. I assumed the funerals would be pretty similar. I could not have been more wrong.

The first funeral was as impressive a celebration of life as I have seen in a long time. All of the man's children and grandchildren were present. I realized all of his kids had become individuals of impact and character in their own right. They have good relationships (not perfect) with each other and their respective communities. Several of his grandchildren spoke about what they had learned from their grandfather and memories of him. "I remember when Grandpa ..." was said countless times. He clearly had impacted multiple generations during his life.

But it was not just family. Several executives representing the company of one of the sons flew in from the East Coast for the funeral. The room was filled with standing room-only with hundreds of friends and relatives. I was amazed at how many people his life had clearly touched.

Major-league baseball player and sometimes humorist Yogi Berra joked, "You should always go to other people's funerals or they won't come to yours." That was not why I was glad I went, however. I was glad because it was the kind of funeral that makes you think, "I want my funeral to look like this." Of course, his funeral looked like that because his life had looked like that.

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Later that week, I checked in on the other funeral. It turned out that fewer than 10 people came. They had to hire a preacher since no preacher was close enough to the man to offer up his services.

It was not like the man had spent his past 30 years off the grid. He had a very full life, but it led to an empty funeral. Why? Because his life was full of the wrong things. His life was self-absorbed, full of mostly stuff and material things, not healthy relationships and positive influence.

I thought the funerals would be the same, but they were complete opposites.

New York Times columnist and news commentator David Brooks described this more succinctly, stating our culture honors “resume virtues,” but we need to seek “eulogy virtues” in our own lives. Maybe he had attended a funeral just before he wrote that.

Funerals have a way of making us slow down and ponder the brevity of life – and our priorities for life. They make us think toward the eternal and the Divine. They cause us to cut through the routines and noise of life to contemplate whether life is going the way we want. They make us celebrate people above things and activities. They make us look back, which can often help us look forward.

Perhaps that’s why the book of Ecclesiastes says, *“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, since that is the end of all mankind, and the living should take it to heart” (Ecclesiastes 7:2).*

I certainly understand that death has a sad and even shocking side to it. But if you get a chance to watch a celebration of a life done well, take it in.

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## Reflection/Discussion Question

1. When was the last time you attended a funeral? What were your impressions of what transpired during that service?
2. Mr. Graves describes two funeral ceremonies conducted in the same community, but their impact seemed very different. How would you explain the differences between them?
3. Have you ever contemplated what your own funeral or memorial service might be like one day? Is that how you would like it to be? If not, in light of the discussion in this “Monday Manna,” how could you go about changing that?
4. What is the difference between “resume virtues” and “eulogy virtues”? Do these occur naturally, or are they established through intentionality?

## NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

*Psalm 90:12; Ecclesiastes 2:16,24, 5:10-15, 7:1-4; Romans 6:19-23*

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