

Planning Your Everafter

Would you...

...like your family to be so distracted with chaotic loose ends after your death that it makes it impossible for them to grieve in a healthy way?

Do you...

...want to leave your children with your affairs in such a mess that could actually create family drama bad enough to estrange your kids from each other?

Or,...

Would you...

...want to make a difference with how healthy your kid's relationships would be with each other after you're gone?

Would you...

...like your family to be overwhelmed by your love because of how generous and organized you were, right to the end?

If you answered "no" to the first two questions, and "yes" to the last two, there is very good news! When it comes to end-of-life and postmortem issues, you don't have to be in the dark. You don't have to leave your kids clueless, powerless, or moneyless (and really angry too)! There is plenty of hope and help available for planning your "everafter." Even if you have many years before you pass, the time to tie up all those loose ends and get your affairs in order is *now*!

Over the two decades I have served in the role of a pastor at our church, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly when a death occurs. The primary purpose for getting our affairs in order is to provide PEACE OF MIND for ourselves and for others; to ensure minimal difficulties and confusion for the significant people in our life at the time of our death.

Before we dive into all the things you can and should do to put your final affairs in order, let's look at a few things you will want to **avoid**:

Keep secrets

A member of our congregation had completely preplanned their own funeral. She bought her plot and prepaid for the funeral, wrote out the hymns, the order of service, who she wanted pallbearers to be, who the minister should be, what the obituary and the eulogy should say. But she never told any of this to her four kids, who quickly put together a funeral when she died, making different choices (and paying double) all the way through. Two weeks later, when they saw the estate planner their mom used, he said, "I'm sure you were comforted to know your mom had everything preplanned." And that's how they found out. Not all secrets are easy to share, but nonetheless they should be told.

Fail on the follow-through

There are countless stories of elders telling their relatives, "When I go, this _____ [fill in the blank: ring, painting, house] is yours." But if that intended gift isn't recorded in a will or an addendum to it called a "letter of intent," and attached to your will, the gift may never pass to that person. I've seen siblings go to all-out war over the smallest, insignificant items left by their parent, never to reconcile again. If you want someone in particular to get a cherished heirloom, put that in your will. Or consider avoiding the whole potential mess by having a garage sale and selling your item.

Make technical blunders

These are the worst because they're avoidable. Don't, for example, name one child as the beneficiary of your IRA if you intend for that person to split the money with the other children. The recipient will have to withdraw money from the account and pay taxes to cash out. Instead, name every person you intend to receive money on each of your IRAs' beneficiary forms.

Because life happens and circumstances evolve, including remarriages, failing to keep a will up to date can be a problem as well. Ask yourself, "does your will today still reflect your original intentions when you drafted it back in the day?"

Leave a mess — literally

Why wait? Don't put it off any longer! Clear your home of all the clothes you haven't worn for years (and don't fit you anyway), those magazines, receipts, and canceled checks from the 20th century. Then, after your departure, your children don't need to waste part of their lives and spend considerable amount of money

cleaning out your home and getting it in salable condition. Or pay a company to come clean everything out at once and then feel guilty about that.

Be vague about treatment

The only thing worse than kids fighting after their parents die is having them squabble over Mom's still-breathing body. But that happens time and again when people fail to plan properly for their end-of-life care, says Karen Wyatt, a hospice M.D. from Dillon, Colo., and the author of several books about end-of-life issues.

Parents often tell their children they don't want “extraordinary measures” but fail to complete the paperwork so their specific preferences are documented and the children can participate in the medical decision-making. Or they name the wrong child as their health care proxy — say, picking the oldest because of birth order, rather than the child best equipped to deal with doctors. And even with documents available, many families get confused about what everything means; without a conversation, children won't fully understand what a parent intends.

“We have to prepare ourselves for our death with the same care and attention as our parents prepared themselves for our births.”

—Henri Nouwen, theologian and spiritual writer

Five Areas of Planning Your Everafter

Now let's look at 5 main areas to address in preparation for your “everafter”.

1) Tips for Funeral Planning on a Budget

Now for the good news! Even though it's never easy to deal with postmortem issues, whether yours in advance or a loved one's, knowing what services you need and which are optional can help you plan a worthy service to memorialize a loved one and even yourself.

1. Talk about it. Talk with your family to learn individual expectations and preferences. When people learn about the costs, they often opt for lower-cost options, such as having family members drive themselves to the cemetery instead of hiring a limousine. Sharing information with the family also helps avoid bad feelings.
2. Shop in advance. Often, death results from a long illness. That offers you the opportunity to shop and compare prices.
3. Ask for a price list. The law requires funeral homes to give you written price lists for products and services.
4. Skip embalming. According to Funeral Consumer Alliance (www.funerals.org) funeral homes want you to pay for embalming, but it's never routinely required for every death, and it's never required by law for a viewing. Embalming, which is only done in the United States and Canada, does not protect the public from disease; it is merely a cosmetic preservative process in which the deceased's body is injected with formaldehyde. Refrigeration prior to burial is considered by many to be a better (and cheaper) option.
5. Leave out the funeral home. Consider having the viewing and funeral at a church, hotel, or other location—including your or the deceased's home. This saves the cost of viewing and funeral fees. At our church we encourage families to have the viewing at the church on the same day as the funeral, one hour prior to the start of the service.
6. Don't buy the casket from the funeral home, which typically marks up casket prices by 300% to 500%. Instead, rent your casket or buy it on the Internet; most sellers provide overnight shipping directly to the funeral home of your choice. Funeral directors are required to accept any casket you supply, and they are not permitted to charge handling fees. The FTC (Federal Trade Commission) also warns that caskets described as "gasketed," "protective," or "sealed" don't help preserve remains indefinitely and are an unnecessary cost.
7. Burial vaults and grave liners aren't always necessary. While private cemeteries sometimes require burial vaults and grave liners, state laws don't.
8. Consider cremation. If it doesn't conflict with your cultural or religious beliefs, you can avoid embalming and the cost of a casket if you choose cremation. If

ashes are spread in a favorite place or kept at home, you avoid the cost of a cemetery plot as well. Nearly 56% of families opted for cremation in 2020 (up 8.1% from 2015), according to the National Funeral Directors Association.

9. Avoid emotional overspending. It's not necessary to have the fanciest casket or the most elaborate funeral to properly honor a loved one.

10. Apply the same smart shopping techniques you use for other major purchases. You can cut costs by limiting the viewing to one day or one hour before the funeral, and by dressing your loved one in a favorite outfit instead of costly burial clothing.

11. Take advantage of veterans' benefits. All veterans are entitled to a free burial in a national cemetery along with a grave marker. Spouses and dependent children also are entitled to a lot and marker when buried in a national cemetery. There are no charges for opening or closing the grave, for a vault or liner, or for setting the marker in a national cemetery. For information on veteran entitlements, visit the Department of Veterans Affairs' website at www.cem.va.gov or call your local veterans office.

12. Know your rights. Laws for funerals and burials vary from state to state. Contact your state's Office of Consumer Affairs or the Office of the Attorney General to find out which goods or services you're required to purchase.

12. Lastly, if you are an active member of our church there are no fees associated with the viewing and funeral service held at the church. You can contact us in advance and we'll be glad to walk you through all the components of a funeral service so you can tend to as many or as few details as you like, right down to who speaks at your service, what music is played, and writing your own obituary. (Ronald Reagan famously left a 300-page plan for his state funeral.)

What About Pre-Planning a Funeral?

Many people have engaged in "pre-needs planning." You can make sure you have it your way, and make it easier on your loved ones—by purchasing your own gravesite, contracting with a funeral home, and purchasing a headstone or marker.

Pre-needs planning offers four benefits:

1. You ensure that your funeral is exactly what you want.
2. You spare your family the challenge of paying for the event.
3. You allow your surviving spouse and children to avoid the trauma of having to make big decisions during an emotionally difficult time.
4. You eliminate the risk that family members might fight over the arrangements or be confused or abused by funeral home or cemetery sales pitches.

When considering pre-needs planning, shop around like you would for any other major purchase, taking the time to compare prices and features. You can prearrange your funeral by contracting with a local funeral home, or you can turn to a memorial society—a nonprofit organization that helps people plan cost-effective funerals (such as funerals.org).

Before signing a pre-needs contract, consider these issues:

1. Decide on your needs and preferences. You can limit your effort to buying the cemetery plot or casket, or you can pay for services and other costs, too.
2. Assess the financial soundness of your vendors. It could be years, even decades, before you use the products and services you're buying. Will the manufacturer still be in business? Will the product still be offered and, if not, who will choose its replacement?
3. Ask questions about your money. What happens to the money you pay to the funeral arranger? Who gets the interest on that money? How are you protected if the firm goes out of business before you die? Can you cancel and get a refund?
4. Consider what happens if you move. Where will you die? Before you choose a cemetery and funeral home, think about the possibility that you may move across the country in 10 years to be closer to children and grandchildren. Will you want your body to be shipped back to your hometown? Who will pay for that expense? Can your prepaid funeral be transferred to another location if you move?
5. Inform your family. It's not enough to have a funeral contract stashed away in a drawer or safe deposit box. You need to tell your kids about your plans. If you don't, you might pay for your funeral all over again. Although it might be difficult

to talk about this with your children, it's the responsible and mature action. And although they might dislike the conversation, deep down they'll be relieved.

6. Plan for future costs. If you don't fully prepay for everything, you'll want to make sure your family has the money to pay the inevitable bills. That means buying a life insurance policy or maintaining funds in a bank account—but make sure the monies will be available quickly. Without proper financial planning, the pre-needs planning can prove inadequate, as it can take weeks, months, or even years before the bank assets or insurance proceeds become available.

2) Financial Planning with the End in Mind

It goes without needing to convince anyone, we *all* must pay attention to our personal finances. Like it or not, we all need to eliminate debts, build cash reserves, buy and manage investments, prepare our tax returns, develop an estate plan, save for college and retirement, make the best use of workplace benefit programs, and buy the right types and amounts of insurance.

When it comes to the end in mind, retirees tend to have three primary sources of income: Social Security, pensions, and savings they've accumulated on their own or in their company retirement plans. The question is: Will that be enough? The key to your investment success is to shoot for as much diversification as possible now so when you're ready for your retirement lifestyle your money is ready and waiting for you.

Because every person's current situation and plans for their future is so unique, not to mention the voluminous investment options out there, it is highly recommended hiring the services of a reputable and trusted financial advisor. They will help you create what's called a "life view plan." The purpose of the plan is to identify and clarify your financial goals for your future and develop a financial strategy for your life to reach those goals. To maintain optimum performance, it is recommended you have your advisor perform periodic reviews of your financial plan to make sure it remains current and viable.

3) Estate Planning—Wills, Living Wills, Durable Powers of Attorney for Health Care, Durable General Powers of Attorney

If you skip this third area because you think it's just for rich people, you'd be making a big mistake! Understand, the truth is everyone—including you—has an estate. Your estate is simply the total value of everything you own minus debts. The goal of estate planning is simply to transfer your assets to your heirs after your death.

Wills

When a person dies (yes, even single persons), their assets are given to their heirs. This raises the question: Who gets what? That's why you need a will. Through it, you leave instructions for the disposition of your assets, which can include the following:

- Whether to pay off mortgages and auto loans
- What debts are to be eliminated
- What assets are to be sold, such as real estate or businesses
- To whom remaining assets are to be given, including family heirlooms and items of sentimental value, as well as financial assets
- When assets are to be distributed (immediately, at some specified time in the future, or upon satisfaction of certain conditions)
- Who is to be “legal guardian” and assume responsibility for raising minor children
- Who is to ensure that all these instructions are implemented correctly (called the “executor” or “personal representative”)
- And any other instructions you wish to leave

Due to the complex nature, legal aspects, and unique personal wishes related to formulating wills, it is highly recommended you contact a reputable and trustworthy attorney to assist you instead of attempting to do-it-yourself.

Like financial plans, estate plans require periodic review to make sure they remain current and viable. So, when should you revise your will? When...

- ...your marital status has changed,
- ...your state of residence has changed,
- ...your income or net worth has changed,
- ...your health has changed,
- ...family members have died or been born, or
- ...five years have passed.

Remember, if there's one thing you must leave your family, it's PEACE. Don't set the stage for a family war, or Thanksgiving dinner will never be the same. Talk with your family about your plans and about theirs. Above all else, remember: A will is a terrible place to keep secrets.

Living Wills

Living wills are used to declare your preferences for medical treatment in the event you become terminally ill. The purpose of this tool is to help take the guess work out of decisions that need to be made, usually by closest family members, when you are unable to do so for yourself. The same attorney that assists you with a will can assist you with a living will.

Durable Powers of Attorney for Health Care

This document designates another person to make medical decisions for you if you are unable to make them for yourself.

Note: In many states, the above two documents have been replaced by a Medical or Advanced Directive and Health Care Proxy.

Durable General Powers of Attorney

This document allows another person (usually a spouse) to sign legal documents for you. The key word here is durable, for ordinary powers become void if you become incapacitated. Be aware that you are granting the person you name in this document unlimited access and control of all your assets.

4) Insurance

Let's make one thing very clear when it comes to insurance—there is only ONE purpose for insurance: To protect against a *financial* loss. Insurance can never protect anyone from incurring a loss—whether it be the loss of a car, home, health, or life. Loss comes with life. Insurance is designed to prevent us and our loved ones from suffering *financially* as a result of incurring a loss.

Unless your philosophy of life is, “It won't happen to me!”, you must manage risk. Your greatest asset is *your ability to produce an income*. Because every person's and family's current and future anticipated needs are so unique, it's imperative that you sit down with a reputable and trusted Licensed Independent Insurance Agent or Broker to comparison shop and determine your needs and the needs of your family for the following:

1. Disability Income Insurance (DI)—coverage in the event of an injury or illness that forces one to stop working.
2. Long-Term Care Insurance—coverage for nursing home care, assisted living, or a home health care aide if we find ourselves requiring assistance with daily life.
3. Life Insurance—coverage at the time of death for funeral costs, to pay off debts, and to provide for surviving loved ones.

Term or Permanent Life Insurance:

A. There are three kinds of Term insurance to choose from:

- Annual renewable term (ART)
- Level term
- Decreasing term

B. There are three variations of permanent insurance:

- Whole life
- Universal life
- Variable life

“Whoever created the term ‘life insurance’ had to be the sales genius of all time.”

—Robert Half

5) The “Love Drawer”

Consider the following: If you were in a serious or fatal accident, would your loved ones know whom to contact? How would they know your wishes? Would they know where to look for all your important paperwork?

If necessary, could they find out quickly your advanced directive/health care proxy, what coverage your health insurance or life insurance provides, and your last will and testament?

Do they know where a copy of your current employee handbook is listing the benefits for which they may be eligible?

Or, would your survivors have to spend months trying to find your important personal papers trying to settle your estate without knowing your intentions?

Who do you want to have copies of your information?

Getting our affairs in order requires us to ask ourselves these questions and answer them. The goal is to designate a location whether it be an actual drawer, safe deposit box, strongbox, or shoebox, where all your end-of-life documents are secured. Next is to determine who else you can trust to know the location of your Love Drawer and who you will trust to have copies of all your documents.

Then, have the conversation with your loved ones as soon as possible rather than waiting until the last minute or not taking care of it at all—perhaps a special family gathering or the next holiday.

“Preparing doesn’t mean you’re ready to go tomorrow. Or, that you will go tomorrow. In the matter of life and death, we can’t control the timing of either. Both are on God’s schedule.”

—Ron Gonzalez, Pastor

In Closing

Our hope is that this document, though not in-depth in any comprehensive way with the areas included, has helped you to 1) organize your thoughts by breaking down the specific areas you need to address, 2) begin formulating a game plan for your hereafter, and 3) motivate you to carry out your game plan.

Our final encouragement to you is this: This *is* doable! Yes, you *can* do this. Like the old adage, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Set a goal to tackle one of the five areas at a time. Put them in the order of priority that’s right for you and get it done.

In revisiting one of the initial questions, we trust your answer is still “yes” : Would you like your family to be overwhelmed by your love because of how generous and organized you were, right to the end?

“When the time comes to die, make sure that all you have to do is to die.”

—Jim Elliot, Martyred missionary