

# 7 Ways to Personalize

A FUNERAL SERVICE





If you are planning a funeral for a loved one or are planning ahead for your own funeral wishes, then it's essential that you understand the purpose and value of meaningful personalization. When we lose someone we love, we must experience both grief and mourning if we want to find healing.

### **Aren't they the same thing?**

They actually aren't! According to nationally respected grief educator Dr. Alan Wolfelt, grief is the internal experience – feeling sadness, anger, regret, shock. Mourning, on the other hand, is the public, outward expression of our inner feelings. It's the opportunity to outwardly express our emotions through action.

### **So, what does this have to do with personalization?**

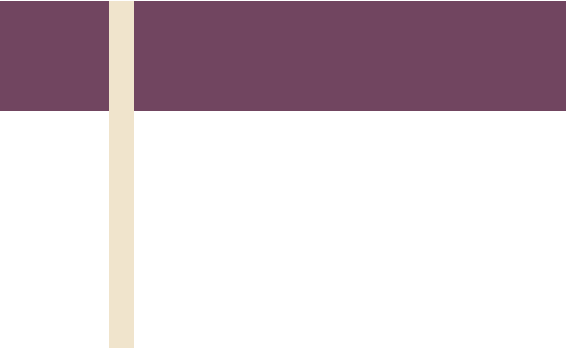
To create a funeral or memorial service that feels right, that honors a life, that helps you mourn, it must be personal. As people, we are unique individuals. Because we are so different, because we have our own nuances and intricacies, it makes sense to customize a funeral or memorial service. Just as we personalize our weddings, our birthdays, or our anniversaries, the final celebration of our lives should reflect who we are, what we value, and what we leave behind as a legacy to others.



But how do you personalize a service?  
What does that look like?

Today, we'll discuss the 7 elements of a funeral and how you can personalize each one to create a truly meaningful and one-of-a-kind final tribute that has **“YOU”** written all over it.





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# 1 WHY DOES **Personalization Matter?**





# DR. ALAN WOLFELT

**nationally  
recognized  
grief counselor  
and educator**

**“I encourage you to slow down,  
take a deep breath and focus  
on what is really important—  
what is essential—about the  
funeral you are planning. What  
is essential is the life that was  
lived and the impact that life  
had on family and friends.  
To honor that unique life, the  
funeral must also be unique.  
Over and over, families tell me  
that the best funerals are those  
that are personalized.”**





In a world focused on efficiency and getting things done as quickly as possible, the funeral is a moment to slow down and be thoughtful.

**According to Dr. Alan Wolfelt, the funeral or memorial service serves several essential purposes, including:**

- Helps us acknowledge the reality of the death
- Sets the stage for a healthy grief journey
- Helps us move toward our pain so we can begin to process it
- Allows us to remember and honor a life lived
- Helps us develop our new identity after a loss
- Activates a community of support for mourners

However, a funeral or memorial service cannot hope to meet these needs if it's impersonal and hollow. That's why personalization is key! A personalized service beautifully and lovingly honors life. It creates a sweet moment of remembrance, a time to say goodbye, a unique acknowledgement that a person's life mattered in all the big and small ways.

But how does personalization work and what does it look like? For that, let's discuss the 7 elements of a funeral!

# 2

## The Seven **Elements of a Funeral**





**For more than 30 years, Dr. Alan Wolfelt has walked alongside families during times of loss and grief.**

One thing he discovered is that the funeral matters, and there are 7 key elements to include in a meaningful service. They are music, readings, viewing/visitation, eulogy, symbols, gathering, and actions. When you personalize these elements, you can create a funeral experience that will touch hearts and meaningfully celebrate someone loved. Let's look at each element and discuss how you can personalize it.

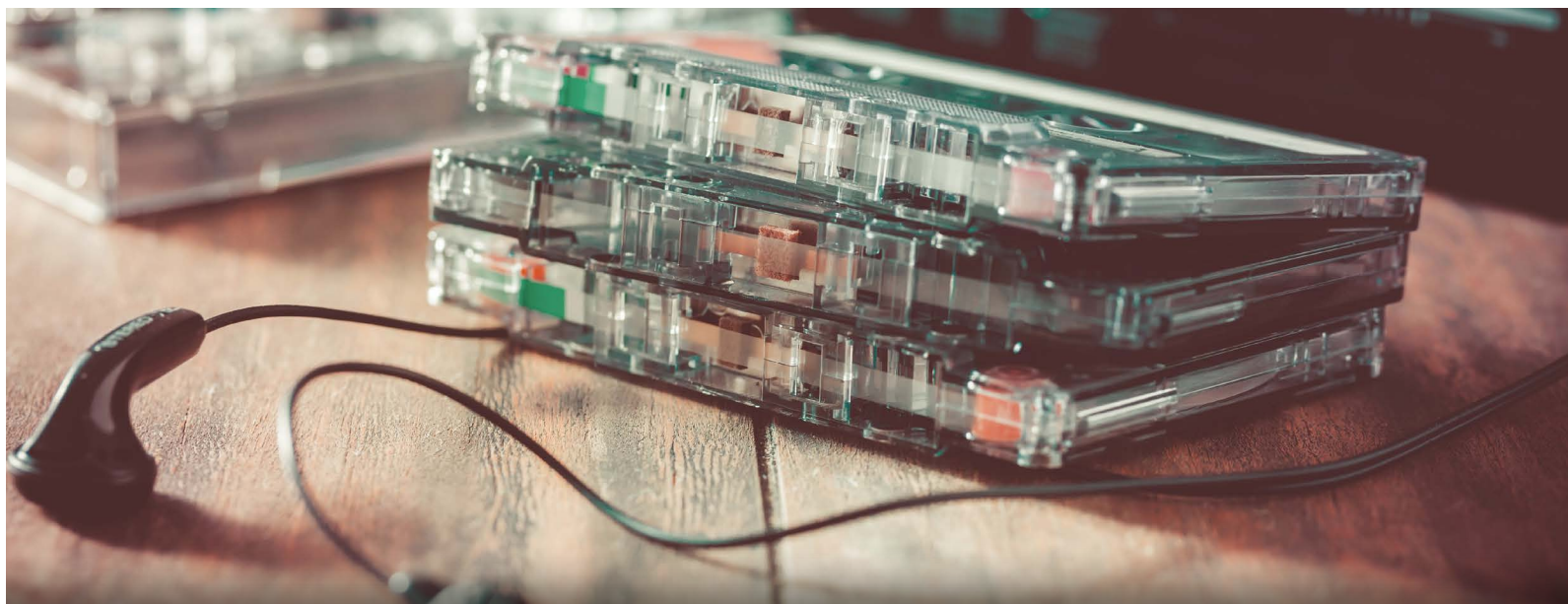




# MUSIC

**Music sets the tone of a funeral or memorial service and brings emotions to the forefront.** In fact, one of the purposes of a funeral is to allow mourners to grieve together, and in many ways, music says what words cannot. We often shy away from our emotions, but don't be afraid to invite people to express their grief. Consider using music as an avenue to bring out what people are thinking and feeling. Plus, you can add a deeply personal touch by selecting music that was dear to the person who has died.





### How to personalize:

- Choose songs of any musical genre that are meaningful
- Consider whether to use live music or recorded music
- Ask musical family members to play a tribute song
- For those who are religious, choose appropriate hymns or praise songs

**What are some favorite songs that come to mind?**

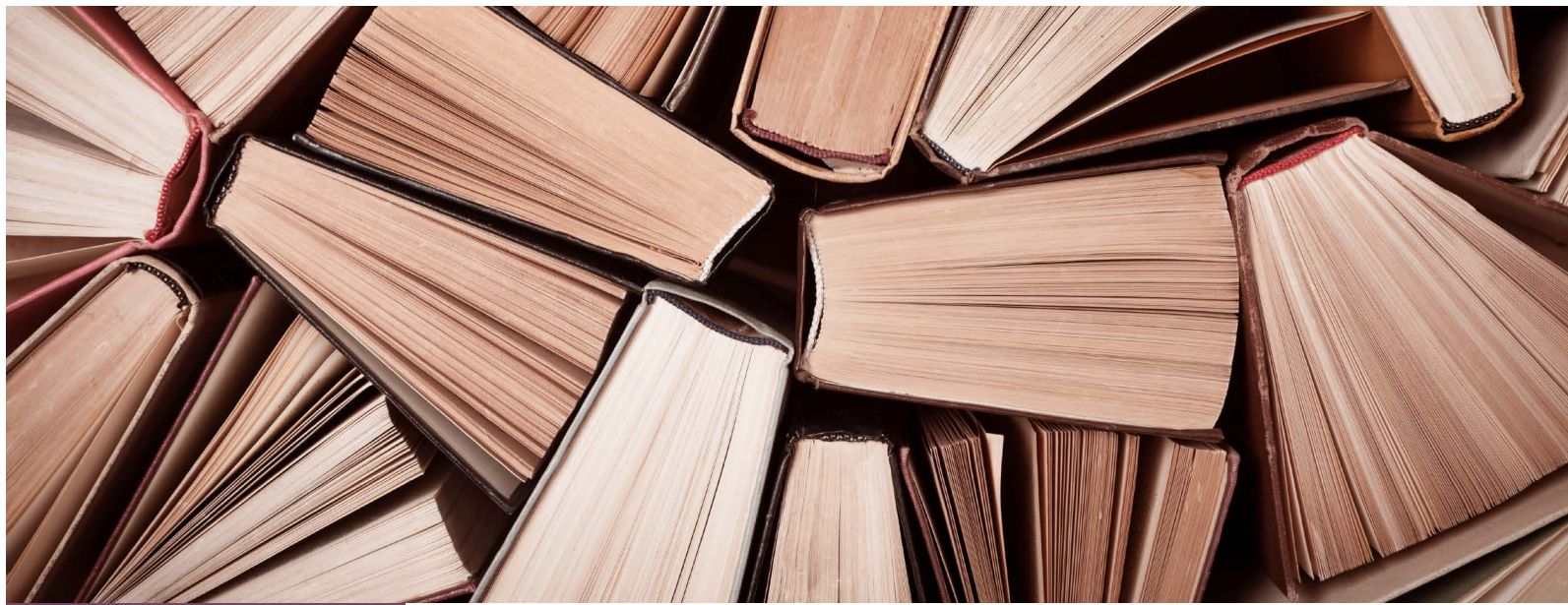
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# — READINGS

**Readings add another facet to a meaningful service.** They are another way to invite mourners to express their emotions while also honoring the unique spirit of the one who has died. Have you ever heard a poem, lyrics, or movie quote that really spoke to you? These can easily be used as a reading and can add a deeper dimension to the service.



### How to personalize:

- Use quotes from favorite books, plays, movies, or TV shows
- Read passages from an appropriate holy book
- Read a letter you have written to your lost loved one
- Include your loved one's own writing
- If you are planning ahead, consider writing a message ahead of time to be read at the service

**Can you think of any readings that would be particularly special to you or your loved ones?**

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# VIEWING

**The viewing or visitation is a time for family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors to gather and express support and sympathy.** Plus, it's a special time for personalization – an opportunity to tell the story of a lifetime. If you choose, a viewing creates an opportunity for mourners to see this special person one last time and begin to acknowledge the reality of their death. Alternatively, a family can choose to simply have a visitation, which is a set aside time to gather and receive support from caring friends and family without the body present.





### How to personalize:

- Display photos, mementos, or items associated with a hobby or interest (books, artwork, ceramics, model planes, etc.)
- Invite guests to write down a memory on provided notecards
- Provide a keepsake token (a book, a favorite recipe, etc.)
- Create a memorial work of art, like a thumbprint tree
- Bring a photo book or your loved one's favorite book and ask people to write notes inside

**What are some cherished possessions you could use to personalize a service?**

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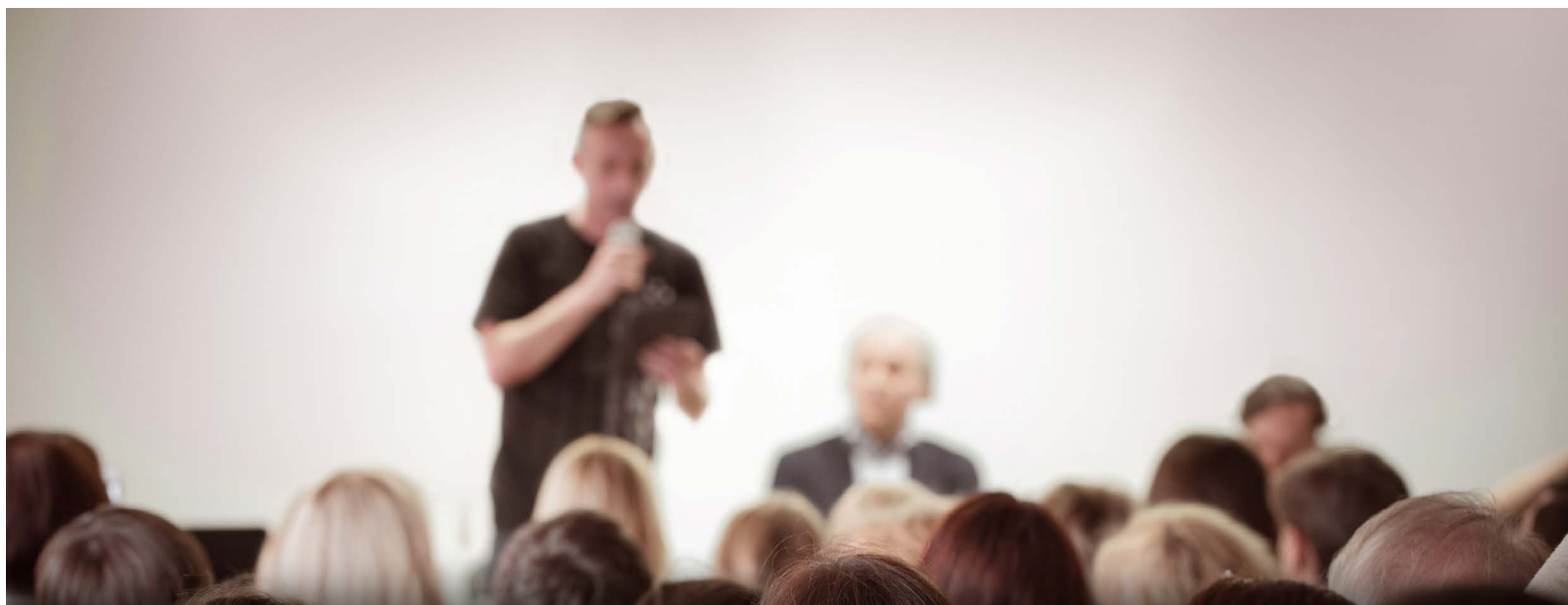
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# EULOGY



**The eulogy may be the single most important aspect of a funeral service.** It's important to be thoughtful and spend concentrated time deciding what you want to say. After all, the eulogy is the time to acknowledge and affirm the significance of the life lived. The eulogy can be delivered by a clergy person, a family member, or even by a series of people.



### How to Personalize:

- Share memories, quotes, or even a loved one's favorite jokes
- Tell a significant and meaningful story
- Bring visual aids (like an item the person was known to cherish)
- Share something the person taught you and how they impacted your life

**Are there any accomplishments, goals, dreams, or stories you don't want forgotten?**

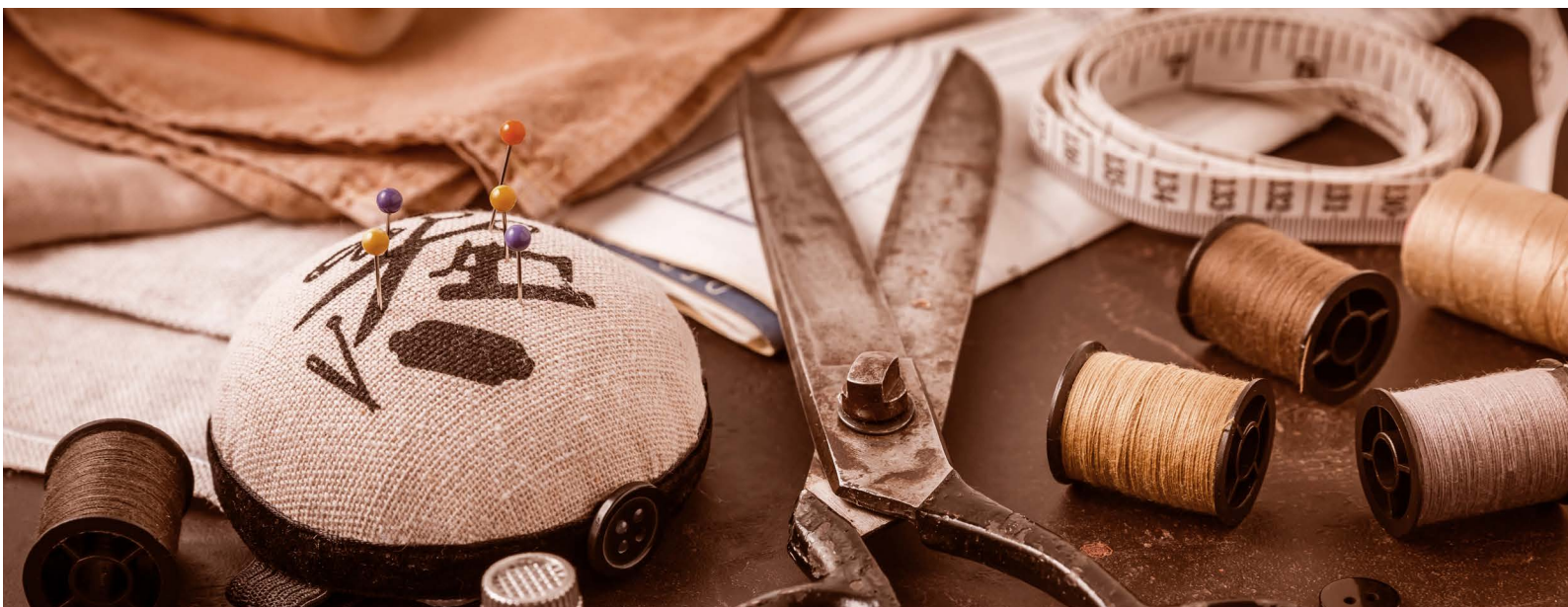
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# SYMBOLS

**Symbols are an important aspect of a funeral because they convey love and comfort, facilitate expression, and offer a focus point for the bereaved.** For one grieving family, an appropriate symbol was the quilts their grandmother made. Before her death, she made a quilt for every child and grandchild, and at her final tribute, the quilts were displayed on the pews – a representation of her love and impact on her family. Common symbols are an appropriate religious symbol, flowers, dark clothing, and candles, but you can use whatever feels best to honor your loved one.



### How to personalize:

- Include a procession to greet the family, view the body, or travel to the cemetery
- Ask guests to wear your loved one's favorite color to the funeral
- With traditional burial, the body and casket are the ultimate symbol or focal point
- With cremation, a symbol might be an urn, a portrait, or some other appropriate item
- Include religious symbols to offer comfort
- Turn special items into a symbol

**Is there any particular item, hobby, or interest that people associate with you or your loved one?**

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# — GATHERING

**The gathering is an opportunity for friends and family to come together after the funeral service to share stories and to support each other.** It's also the perfect time for personalization! The point of a gathering is to bring people together directly following the service to share stories, remember a loved one, and connect (or reconnect) with people.





### How to Personalize:

- Have the gathering at your lost loved one's favorite restaurant
- Choose a venue that means something to the person who died
- Serve your loved one's favorite foods
- Display photos, cherished possessions, and mementos
- Decorate with your loved one's favorite colors
- Include time to publicly share special memories
- Create a memorial work of art together or plant a memorial tree

Is there a special place that comes to mind?

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# — ACTIONS

**And finally, by inviting others into action at the funeral service, you engage mourners and invite them to put their grief into motion.**

Simply put, mourning is the outward expression of our inward grief. To move others toward healing, it is important to invite them to act.



### How to personalize:

- Participate in a release ceremony (lanterns, doves, etc.)
- Invite mourners to write down memories on notecards
- Create a group photo collage
- Set a theme (i.e., Hawaiian shirts, sports jerseys, etc.)
- Light candles of remembrance
- Ask people to take part in the service as eulogists, readers, singers, musicians, or pallbearers
- Include a procession to greet the family, view the body, or travel to the cemetery

**Are there any activities you would like to include  
as a way to honor life?**

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# 3 What Should I **Do Next?**





Now that you know what it means to personalize a funeral, it's time to put that knowledge into action.

## Here are our recommended next steps:

- 1. *Talk to family members.*** If you have two or three minds brainstorming together, you'll come up with personalization ideas you never would have thought of on your own. Plus, sharing the experience with others makes it easier emotionally and less stressful.
- 2. *Speak with a funeral planning professional.*** Not only will a funeral professional help you cover all your bases, but they also have years of experience with personalization. They can help you bring your ideas to life or make suggestions when you get stuck.



- 3. *Create a personalized and meaningful funeral or memorial service.*** Whether burial or cremation is chosen, it's important to put all this personalization into a beautiful event that will honor a person's life and allow the living to say goodbye.
- 4. *Plan ahead for your own funeral wishes.*** It's emotionally difficult to plan a funeral when you're also dealing with feelings of grief. By planning ahead, you have the chance to 1) make your wishes known, 2) take all the time you need to add personalized details, and 3) give your family a true gift by removing the stress and pressure of planning a funeral at a time of loss. When they know your wishes ahead of time, everything goes much more smoothly.



Now, best of luck as you work with family, friends,  
and professionals to create a one-of-a-kind event  
that truly reflects and celebrates individuality,  
personality, and legacy.

