

# GRETCHEN RUBIN

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## FUNERAL READINGS FROM *HAPPIER* PODCAST LISTENERS

After the tremendous response to our wedding readings, several listeners suggested compiling a list of readings suitable for funerals or memorial services. Listeners contributed many wonderful recommendations, and I hope you'll find this selection helpful.

Onward and upward!

Gretchen

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### **Ecclesiastes 3**

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour,

it is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past. And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

**“Turn Again to Life” by Mary Lee Hall**

If I should die and leave you here a while,  
Be not like others sore undone, Who keep  
long vigil by the silent dust. For my sake turn  
again to life and smile, Nerving thy heart and  
trembling hand To do something to comfort  
other hearts than thine. Complete these dear  
unfinished tasks of mine And I perchance may  
therein comfort you.

**“i carry your heart with me” by e.e. cummings**

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 the sky of a tree  
called life; which grows higher than the 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)

**“We Are Seven” by William Wordsworth**

-- A simple Child,  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death?  
I met a little cottage Girl:  
She was eight years old, she said;  
Her hair was thick with many a curl  
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,  
And she was wildly clad:  
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;  
-- Her beauty made me glad.

“Sisters and brothers, little Maid,  
How many may you be?”  
“How many? Seven in all,” she said,  
And wondering looked at me.

“And where are they? I pray you tell.”  
She answered, “Seven are we;  
And two of us at Conway dwell,  
And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-yard lie,  
My sister and my brother;  
And, in the church-yard cottage, I  
Dwell near them with my mother.”

“You say that two at Conway dwell,  
And two are gone to sea,  
Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,  
Sweet Maid, how this may be.”

Then did the little Maid reply,  
“Seven boys and girls are we;  
Two of us in the church-yard lie,  
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,  
Your limbs they are alive;  
If two are in the church-yard laid,  
Then ye are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”  
The little Maid replied,  
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,  
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,  
My kerchief there I hem;  
And there upon the ground I sit,  
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sun-set, Sir,  
When it is light and fair,  
I take my little porringer,

And eat my supper there.  
“The first that died was sister Jane;  
In bed she moaning lay,  
Till God released her of her pain;  
And then she went away.  
“So in the church-yard she was laid;  
And, when the grass was dry,  
Together round her grave we played,  
My brother John and I.

“And when the ground was white with snow,  
And I could run and slide,  
My brother John was forced to go,  
And he lies by her side.”

“How many are you, then,” said I,  
“If they two are in heaven?”  
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,  
“O Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead!  
Their spirits are in heaven!”  
’Twas throwing words away; for still  
The little Maid would have her will,  
And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

**From *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather**

-- A simple Child,

There were certain days in her life, outwardly uneventful, which Alexandra remembered as peculiarly happy; days when she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination in the soil. There were days, too, which she and Emil had spent together, upon which she loved to look back. There had been such a day when they were down on the river in the dry year, looking over the land. They had made an early start one morning and had driven a long way before noon. When Emil said he was hungry, they drew back from the road, gave Brigham his oats among the bushes, and climbed up to the top of a grassy bluff to eat their lunch under the shade of some little elm trees. The river was clear there, and shallow, since there had been no rain, and it ran in ripples over the sparkling sand. Under the overhanging willows of the opposite bank there was an inlet where the water was deeper and flowed so slowly that it seemed to sleep in the sun. In this little bay a single wild duck was swimming and diving and preening her feathers, disporting herself very happily in the flickering light and shade. They sat for a long time, watching the solitary bird take its pleasure.

No living thing had ever seemed to Alexandra as beautiful as that wild duck. Emil must have felt about it as she did, for afterward, when they were at home, he used sometimes to say, "Sister, you know our duck down there—" Alexandra remembered that day as one of the happiest in her life. Years afterward she thought of the duck as still there, swimming and diving all by herself in the sunlight, a kind of enchanted bird that did not know age or change.