

Meeting the Ups and Downs of Life – Week 11

Lesson 4.3 – When a Loved One Dies Suddenly

We're picking up toward the end of our discussion about Darla, who suddenly lost her husband of 42 years in a car accident. We talked about the suddenness of the loss and the impact that has on grief. We also talked about how to follow up with Darla and make sure she is being cared for, since she is struggling with making otherwise simple decisions and doing her daily tasks (preparing and eating meals, doing laundry, going shopping, etc.). Let's first review three encouragements for believers as they help those who are grieving:

Light from the Word

1. **Galatians 6:2** –
2. **Hebrews 13:5-6** –
3. **Romans 12:6-8, 15** –
4. Now let's look up a few passages that will definitely be of value for Darla as she lives life with this (still very fresh) grief. What truths from the following verses will sustain and support Darla?
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14** –
 - b. **1 Corinthians 15:51-57** –
 - c. **Revelation 21:3-5** –

Further Discussion

5. What might be some additional challenges for those who suffer the sudden death of a small child? To keep things a little more focused, let's say the child was healthy and baptized, but died as the result of an accident.
6. Our priorities may or may not reflect the understanding that death can come at any moment (just like the return of Christ). What things can you do:
 - a. To be prepared for your own death?
 - b. To help loved ones in the event that you would die suddenly?

What other thoughts and questions do you have?

Lesson 5.1 – When Someone We Love Is Afflicted with a Terminal Illness

Goals

- To grow in understanding the spiritual and emotional needs of those who are afflicted with lengthy, terminal illnesses.
- To learn how to help those who are suffering from terminal illnesses.
- To learn how to comfort both those suffering with terminal illnesses and their family members with the Word of God.

Introduction

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-born psychiatrist who has worked extensively with the dying has observed that the terminally ill go through a series of stages as they come to grips with impending death. Below you will find the five stages along with Scripture references related to those stages. For now, we will just read through the stages; each one will be discussed in detail as we go through the lesson.

- Denial and Isolation
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Although these five stages describe (with almost surprising accuracy) the experiences of the majority of those struggling with terminal illnesses, not everyone goes through all the stages. Some may go from hearing the news that they are terminally ill to the acceptance stage. Others may repeat the cycle or portions of it as they hear more about their diseases. Since these grief stages are the common experience of the majority of those who are dying, we will use those stages as the framework for our lesson.

Also of note: this cycle does not occur only in cases of death. People can go through the stages of grief when they lose a job; when they move out of their home; when they enter a new “stage” of life; when plans fall through; and all sorts of other life events.

Life example – Denial and Isolation

Eunice, age 55, was often so exhausted she could hardly finish her daily chores. She had to stop to catch her breath while clearing the table; she had to hang on to furniture when she walked around the house. Thinking that she was just out of shape, she decided on a walking regimen. But after walking only one block, she became so dizzy and out of breath that she could hardly make it back home.

A trip to the doctor brought bad news. She was suffering from congestive heart failure, emphysema, and kidney failure. Besides needing powerful medication, the doctor explained that she would no longer be able to live alone. At the very least, she would need round-the-clock care in her home. She might even need to move to an assisted-living facility. When Eunice called to break the news to her family, she showed no emotion. Though Eunice is not by nature a cold and distant person (others have called her their angel for the compassion she has shown for the sick) she spoke to her family in a very matter-of-fact way. There was no emotion in her voice. There were no tears. She asked for no help. She didn't even ask for advice about how to make plans for her needed care.

Reflections of faith

1. Why do you think people who react like Eunice refuse to accept a doctor's diagnosis?

2. This will be a challenging time for family members who want to help her. How so?

3. When people are in a state of denial, they tend to isolate themselves. But just like we talked about with Darla in the wake of her husband's sudden death, those who are in this stage need family and friends around them. They need someone to listen to them. They need someone to talk to them. If Eunice was a member of your church and your friend, what would you say to her?

Light from the Word

4. Let's read **1 Kings 19:1-5**. Elijah heard the news that his life was threatened by the queen. Eunice found out that she was dying from a terminal disease. Compare the ways they reacted to the news.

5. Fear, denial, and the desire to be alone are often (not always) the first stage of grieving. Elijah's fear was immediate. Jezebel had threatened his life. He fled to the desert and then lay down and asked God to take his life. How might fear show itself in the actions of people dying of terminal illnesses?

6. Elijah expresses a bit of self-righteousness as he talks to God. In what ways might a similar sense of self-righteousness be present in Eunice's heart?

Fear, denial, and the desire to be alone are emotions that often overwhelm people shortly after hearing that they may not have long to live. These are normal emotions, but they are not the best way to deal with troubling news. Elijah prayed for his own death. Likewise, a person afflicted with a terminal illness may often pray for a quick death or may even be tempted to take his or her own life.

7. Turn to **Romans 8:18-21**. What will happen to all creation on the Last Day?
 - a. In what way could you use these words to comfort Eunice as she deals with her diagnosis?

Life Example - Anger

Eunice was very angry with her doctors because, from her point of view, they weren't doing enough to help her. In reality, there wasn't much more they could do. Still, she switched doctors twice. She got some help from home healthcare organization, but that didn't last long either. The caregivers did not want to work with Eunice because she was so bitter, angry, and impossible to please.

8. Describe the difficulties that come from trying to help someone who is in this stage of grief.

Light from the Word

9. We often hear about the beginning and end of Job's story. However, let's read **Job 3:1-4, 24-26** to get a sample of what Job went through in the middle of his story. How would you describe the tone of Job's words?
10. Job was obviously going through a serious spiritual struggle as his life seemed to fall apart. As depressing as it might seem, Eunice might be encouraged as she studies these words. How so?
11. We know the truth of **Romans 8:28** well—God works all things out for good. That's an easier pill to swallow when our troubles seem small. When we're faced with death, we might have a harder time comprehending the good that God is working in our lives. What good can we point to when a person is angry about a terminal illness?
12. Grief doesn't just affect the person who is diagnosed with an illness—loved ones grieve, too. However, what kinds of relationship issues might develop if Eunice and you (a friend or family member) are at different stages of the grieving process?

Closing Prayer 783 Abide with Me v. 5
**I need thy presence every passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me! Amen.**