

Meeting the Ups and Downs of Life – Week 12

Lesson 5.2 – When a Loved One Dies Suddenly

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 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 the middle of Job's 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 have a harder time comprehending the good. What good can we point to when a person is angry about an 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?

Prayer – 783 Abide with Me v. 6

**I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless; ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if thou abide with me.**

LIFE EXAMPLE – Bargaining

Eunice remains terribly frustrated. She tells you that she is praying and praying that God will make her healthy again. She has promised God that if he heals her, she will give all of the money she would be spending on hospital care to Martin Luther College, so that more people have an easier path to becoming pastors and teachers and more people will hear about Jesus through their service. How could God not take that deal? Still, she's not getting any better.

13. The bargaining stage isn't healthy. A person's thought process is completely skewed and disconnected from reality. What false assumptions lead people to think they can bargain with God?

14. What would you say to Eunice as she complains that her bargaining has gotten her nowhere?

Light from the Word

15. Read **1 Samuel 1:10-11**. Hannah wanted a son and prayed fervently for one. What similarities and differences do you notice between Hannah and Eunice?

16. God said "Yes" to Hannah. What caution should we give when we share this story with Eunice?

17. Read **Romans 8:31-32**. What truth does Eunice need to hear from these words?

18. In **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**, Paul prayed that God would take away some sort of affliction. Explain what God's answer to Paul means for those who want to bargain with God.

LIFE EXAMPLE – Depression

Bargaining with God didn't work. Eunice gives up. Deep in self-pity, she sees no hope for her future. Since she doesn't sleep well, she is listless and lies around all day. She forgets things easily. She neglects to take care of much of anything, including herself. She says, "What's the use if I'm just going to die soon?"

19. Depression is a nasty thing to deal with. Where does depression focus people's attention?
 - a. What else does depression do that makes it so hard to deal with, both personally and as a loved one of someone who is in this stage of grief?

Light from the Word

20. In many ways, the thoughts in **Psalm 88:13-18** reflect the thoughts of a person suffering from depression. Using this psalm as a guide, describe some of the feelings Eunice might be feeling.
21. How might you use this psalm as you talk with Eunice?
22. When Paul wrote **Romans 8:37-39**, he and many other Christians were suffering. List the comforts that you can share with Eunice as she suffers.

LIFE EXAMPLE – Acceptance

As time passes, Eunice begins to accept the fact that she is going to die. She trusts that her Savior loves her and that she will be in heaven. When she sees a tear in your eye as you visit with her, she says, “I know. It’s been a rough road. But it’s going to be over soon, whenever the Lord decides to take me home.”

23. Is your work of encouraging over once Eunice reaches this stage? Why or why not?
24. In **2 Corinthians 4:7-15**, God reminds us that he uses frail, ordinary human vessels to convey his precious gospel. He follows with a description of the hope every Christian has. Look at each “comparison” in verses 8 and 9. How are each of these things true for someone like Eunice?
25. What light do these verses shed on the purpose of human suffering?
26. How might Eunice’s suffering be a benefit to others?
27. At each stage of grieving, Eunice has needed help in slightly (or majorly) different ways. What does that tell you about what our first step should be as loved ones who want to help?
28. What does this tell us about the process of offering help to those who suffer from terminal illness?

Prayer – 783 Abide with Me v. 7

**Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes; shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heav’n’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee; in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!**