

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-34 Grief: Facing the End of Life

One of the most difficult counseling situations you will face is helping people cope with their own mortality. Death and grief are difficult subjects for people to deal with. For the believer, death is merely a transition to a wonderful new home. For the unbeliever, death is an unwanted door to the unknown hereafter. Few people have had a “near death” experience, so everyone feels uncertainty as they near the end of life. The Christian counselor can help people accept Christ and become certain about where they will spend eternity. Our lesson today teaches how Jesus dealt with his own approaching death, though he knew it was God’s plan.

Jesus and his disciples went to a garden called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James and John with him. Distress and anguish came over him, and he said to them, “The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch.” He went a little farther on, threw himself on the ground, and prayed that, if possible, he might not have to go through that time of suffering. “My Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want.”

Twice Jesus returned and found the disciples sleeping. After returning the third time he said to his three friends, “Are you still sleeping and resting?”

Immediately the guards came and Judas kissed him saying, “Teacher!” Then the guards arrested Jesus and led him away (Mark 14:32-46, Good News Bible).

Life has no guarantees. The value of the present day can only be judged by comparing today with the past and the future. However, the psalmist said, “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen righteous forsaken nor or their children begging bread” (Ps 37:25). David was convinced that God does not forsake his children or ignore their cries for help.

Jesus was coming to the end of his ministry on earth. All that had been prophesied about the Messiah was happening exactly as God had planned it. Christ had been born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem—as the prophets had foretold. He preached God’s truth and performed signs and wonders. He had been rejected by many and had found no faith among the members of his own town. He would be betrayed by his friends and suffer a cruel death.

Jesus’s death was to fulfill God’s promise to us. The first promise was made to Adam and Eve in the Garden, that the seed of the woman would defeat Satan. John wrote that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to save mankind (John 3:16).

As Jesus was facing his death, why did he ask the disciples to come with him as he prayed? Jesus said to the group of disciples, “*Sit here while I pray.*” Jesus longed to have the group of friends who loved and understood him nearby, while he was suffering. He then asked Peter, James and John, his inner circle, to move even closer to him. He told them, “*Stay here.*” These closer friends he asked to stay even nearer as he agonized in prayer. He wanted them to wait with him. He did not expect them to act on his behalf to change what was going to happen. He asked them just to wait, something that is not easy to do in the face of grief and loss.

Next he said to them, “*Keep watch.*” He asked Peter, James and John to be a buffer between him and outsiders, while he was absorbed in his discussion with God the Father about what was soon to happen.

These examples of Jesus suggest ways you, as a counselor, may help to comfort people who are near life’s end. They also provide ways to help those who have lost a loved one.

- Be honest. Ignoring the facts and attempting to cheer up a dying person and their loved ones rarely benefits or supports them.
- Visit the person, not the disease. Focus the topic of your conversation around offering comfort, help, and relieving stress. One good question is, “What can I do to help?”
- Encourage this person to express their feelings openly. These may include sadness, fear, disappointment, anger, or regret.
- Do not feel it is necessary to talk or fill long pauses with idle talk. Just your presence may be the most important thing you can do.
- Answer questions truthfully. Pray for wisdom to respond to the concerns of people who are suffering.
- If you have any doubt about whether the dying person has made their peace with God, ask them if they have accepted Jesus as their Savior. Pray with them, asking God to give them assurance of their salvation and eternal home.

As a caring counselor, you may be tempted to offer declarations of healing and recovery by quoting promises that may or may not be in God’s plan. Guard against making rash statements that can be cruel. There is a sickness unto death, and the end of each of our days is determined from before the foundation of the earth. As God has a plan for each of us, God had a plan for his only Son. The plan included a difficult death for the redemption of all who would believe.

Our concluding thought looks back to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. God said at his baptism, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). And God had not changed his opinion about his Son. It was with this confidence between the Father and himself that Christ was able to say, “Not my will, but thy will be done.”

Jesus, speaking to his disciples said, “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me” (John 16:32).

This lesson is **important** because it gives us direction on how to deal with death and dying. Even as Jesus is our example in life, his preparation for death teaches us how to help others face death.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that death comes to every person. As a counselor, you can help believers or unbelievers who are facing death. You can minister to their families as well. You do this by reminding them of the example of Jesus as he faced his death, which was a part of the Father’s plan.

To **review**, answer the following questions:

1. When Jesus went to the garden to pray, who did he take with him? [Pause]
A. If you said, “Jesus took the disciples Peter, James, and John with him,” you are correct.
2. How should we answer questions from a grieving or a dying person? [Pause]
A. If you answered, “We should answer questions from the dying and grieving honestly,” you are right.
3. What kind of statements should a counselor avoid when with a dying person? [Pause]
A. If you said, “A counselor should avoid rash statements and promises that may or may not be in God’s plan,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story about how Jesus prepared for his own approaching death. Then tell the story to a fellow believer. Together discuss the most recent deaths in your families. Discuss the difference between the death of a believer and unbeliever. How could these deaths have been handled differently, based on what you learned in this lesson?