

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-35 Grief: Death of a Child

Everyone feels bad when a child dies. It is often hard to understand. God does heal. He can even bring the dead back to life. So why doesn't he always do that? God says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9).

How do people in your country react when a child dies—laugh, cry, or wail loudly? One day Jesus met a desperate father named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. His daughter was dying. Jesus started to follow him home, but was interrupted by a sick woman needing healing. As Jairus waited, word came from his house that his daughter had died. Jesus told him to continue to believe. When they arrived, people were playing a mournful song on flutes. Others were expressing the family's grief, by loud cries and wailing. The house was full of friends. When Jesus arrived, he sent everyone out except the parents and three of his disciples. He took the child by the hand, saying, "My child, get up!" She came back to life (Luke 8:11-54).

Another story in the Bible relates how a child died, even though his parents prayed. Their situation suggests some of the ways a counselor can help families when they experience the loss of a child. This lesson is not about why children die. It is about one man and his wife and the death of their child.

Listen to the summary of their story. One spring the army went to war, but King David remained in Jerusalem. He got up from his bed one evening and paced on the roof of his palace. He noticed a young woman bathing on a nearby roof. The king sent for the woman and slept with her. Later she told him she was expecting his child. He tried to make her husband believe it was his child. However, this plan failed. David then had his officers put the husband in the heat of the battle so he would be killed. After the woman completed her time of mourning, David took her as his wife. The son they conceived was born, but the king's behavior displeased God.

God sent the prophet Nathan to David to tell him a story about a rich man and a poor man. Although the rich man had many sheep, he took the poor man's only pet lamb to cook for his guests. David was ready to punish the rich man who had no pity. He deserved to die. Then Nathan cried, "You are the man!"

David said to the prophet, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die."

The child became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. On the seventh day the child died. Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed and put on clean clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went home. At his request they served him food, and he ate. His

attendants asked him, “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!”

The king answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2Sam 11-12:23).

This story is about parents who have experienced the death of a child. We are not trying to understand why God did what he did. We cannot judge if David’s behavior justified the death of his child. What we can do with this story is learn to help someone with a similar need. In counseling, one can get so involved in the details of a story that you don’t really help the person. When a child dies, it is not a fact-finding mission, but a mission of mercy.

When the child in our story died, David gave us a pattern that others can follow. After days of prayer and no food, David prepared himself and went to God’s house and worshiped. Though God forgives when a person repents, sometimes sin still has consequences. God still loved David. The king realized that the child would not come back. The only way David would see him again was to be faithful to God. He would meet his son again in heaven.

A grieving person at such a time needs support, and ears that will listen. Encourage the grieving person to lay down their pain “for a while.” Then at a better time, they can actually remember the child and what he or she meant to them. A life has ended but the relationship with that person has not. Some people say; “When I see someone I know, who has had a death in their family, I usually avoid them.”

“Why would you do that?” I ask.

“When I ask them how they are doing, they take all day to answer me!” So do not ask an all-day question, unless you are willing to listen all day. Honest listening is an act of love. You may feel awkward about discussing a deceased child. However, a grieving person wants and needs to talk about their loss. The child’s death is only one part of a person’s life. We all need spiritual support as well as grief counseling.

The other issue in this lesson is that every death of a child is not caused by sin. Because we live in a fallen world, babies die at birth, toddlers drown or fall into a fire, school children have accidents. A counselor does not need to know the how and why of the bereaved one’s situation. You are there to support them and help them to heal.

Even if a person has sin they need to repent of, it is the duty of other believers to help restore such people to fellowship. Paul wrote, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. . . . Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1-2). We are not to judge others.

This lesson is **important** because it shows us how to bring comfort to families who have lost a child to death. A counselor should help the grieving person to put their trust in God.

The **main truth** of this lesson is how a counselor can help a person whose child has died. The counselor can listen as they remember the life of their child. He or she can pray with those who are grieving and emphasize that only by accepting Jesus can they see the child again.

To **review** this lesson we ask the following...

1. A helpful counselor is one who does what, when someone loses a child? [Pause]
A. If you said that a helpful counselor is one who listens and prays with those who are grieving, you are correct.
2. What did David do after his child died, which is good advice for a grieving person? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "He washed, changed his clothes, and worshiped in God's house, then went home and ate with his family," you answered correctly.
3. When someone has fallen into sin, whose responsibility is it to help? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Brothers and sisters who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently," you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of the death of David's child. Tell the story to someone who has not heard it and ask about their personal response to people who have lost a child. Do they listen to their story or try to avoid such people and situations? Memorize the following verses: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).