

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-36 Grief: The Comforter

At some point in time, each of us will die. Life on earth will continue without us. What will your loved ones be feeling? Loss and grief are hard to face. How can you counsel someone who has lost a dear friend or family member? The Bible tells us how Jesus reacted to such a death. The two sisters of Lazarus sent a message to Jesus: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” Now Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. However, he stayed where he was for two more days. Then, with his disciples, he went back to Bethany in Judea.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Many Jews from nearby Jerusalem had come to Martha and Mary to console them. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. After talking to Jesus, Martha went back and called her sister. Mary got up and went to the place where Jesus was. She fell at his feet, saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Jesus saw her weeping loudly. He saw that the Jews who had come along with her were also crying. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied. “Jesus wept” (John 11:3-35). Consider Jesus’ response to the death of one of his dear friends. The Book of Hebrews tells us that Christ is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15, KJV). Jesus is compassionate; he really understands! As counselors, we must try to convey his understanding to someone who is grieving a loss. Consider these positive ways to communicate support and comfort to the bereaved:

- *Be honest:* Glossing over the facts and attempting to cheer up both the dying person and their loved one is rarely beneficial or supportive for anyone. There *is* a time to weep.
- *Listen for direction:* Trust the Spirit of God to lead you. You are God’s partner in providing comfort and support to the hurting family.
- *Be slow to speak:* Allow people to express all their concerns as openly as possible. In times of stress, people may say unreasonable things. You do not have to agree with or correct every statement. The Spirit of God will help you know when it is necessary to respond or simply listen. Understand that later the person will be more calm, thoughtful, and clear-headed.
- *Silence is your friend:* Do not feel obligated to talk or fill long pauses. Cultural differences dictate how silence is viewed. You could say, “I would like to sit with you for a while. It is okay if we don’t talk, unless you want to. Is that all right with you?”
- *Do not try to answer for God:* As we see with the sisters of Lazarus, friends and family can be angry with God for not preventing this event. At times, rage and anger may be directed at you, because you are seen as a representative of God. This can be threatening and difficult to manage. Try to understand the pain and fear behind the cursing or blaming of God. We do not need to defend God. You could say, “I see that you are very angry with God. You can tell God that; he is listening. It is okay. He wants to hear how you feel now. You can trust that God will listen to you.”

- *Control your emotions:* Avoid communicating your own anxiety, sadness, or uncertainty. Your own grief should be expressed only in empathy with the person, to let them know it is okay to express their grief. This situation is not about you and your grief, or dismay over the situation. Your time of crying and asking God “why?” needs to wait until later when you are away from the family.
- *Consider family needs:*
 - Avoid shielding children from or misleading them about the reality of death. Say nothing you will later have to go back and correct. Death is not temporary and is not like sleeping. They may be afraid to fall asleep if they connect sleep and death. Your kind face and calmness will help.
 - We cannot change that death is a fact of life on earth. Children will learn coping skills from watching the behavior of other children and adults in this situation. Try to help the family provide the safest and most stable environment for their children.
 - Death takes a life but not the relationship. The experience and expression of grief is a valuable process that gradually permits people to detach themselves in a positive way from the deceased.

In our story Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe” (John 11:25-27). As the Holy Spirit leads you, take the opportunity to tell the grieving person that life goes on after death. Those who believe in Jesus will live with him forever.

This lesson is **important** because it gives direction about counseling a person who has lost a loved one. It shows that we can lend support in positive and Christ-like ways.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that everyone will experience the death of a family member. Like Jesus, we need to express compassion towards the family.

To **review**, answer these questions:

1. How should a counselor respond when someone blames God for a family member’s death?

[Pause]

A. If you answered, “We do not need to defend God, but we should try to help people know that he is listening and he cares,” you answered correctly.

2. Why should a counselor be truthful to a child about death? [Pause]

A. If you said that if children understand the truth about death, they will better adjust to the facts and avoid unrealistic fears of falling asleep and dying, you are right.

3. How much of our own grief should we express to someone we are consoling? [Pause]

A. If you said, “A counselor should share just enough to let them know it is okay for them to express their grief freely,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story of Martha and Mary until you can tell it in your words. Learn the principles for counseling a grieving person. Talk with others about how you reacted when you got word that someone you knew was sick or had died. This may be difficult, but it will help you to better understand others when they tell you about their grief.