Finding Joy in the Valley

Topical – Tough Topics (Death)

Scope and Sequence

Students will discover the comfort in God’s promises when facing the death of a loved one and build confidence in helping others who are dealing with death.

Lesson Objective

**Death is not an end, but a beginning.**

Sticky

Statement

Psalm 23:4

Key Verse

**Salvation:** *“deliverance from the power and effects of sin through the person and work of Jesus Christ”*

Definitions

1. A PowerPoint is available for this lesson.

Checklist

1. A tombstone (Hook)
2. Optional visual: a shepherd’s staff (Lesson Content)
3. Video: Mourning Booth – <https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-1/> (Lesson Content)

Resources

and

References

1. Gaebelein, Frank E. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary.* Volume 5. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991. 217.
2. Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth. *On Death and Dying.* New York: Touchstone, 1969.
3. McKeever, Joe. “What to Say/Not to Say When Someone Dies.” *Pastor Joe McKeever.* March 12, 2016. <https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-2/>
4. Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary.* Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1985. 812.
5. Wiersbe, Warren. *The Bible Exposition Commentary.* Colorado Springs, David C Cook. 136-137.
6. Video: Mourning Booth – <https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-1/>
7. Grief Share: <https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-3/>
8. Axis Ministries: [www.axis.org](http://www.axis.org)

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LESSON OVERVIEW

1. Find **Comfort** in the **Uncomfortable** (Psalm 23:4)
2. Rediscover **Normal** in the New **Normal** (Psalm 34:15, 17-18)
3. Love**One** Who Lost a Loved **One** (Job 2:11-13)
4. Do **something** (Job 2:11)
5. Be **sensitive** (Job 2:12; Romans 12:15)
6. Be **Quiet** (Job 2:13)

**Salvation:** “*deliverance from the power and effects of sin through the person and work of Jesus Christ”*

**Death is not an end, but a beginning.**

HOOK

Teacher’s Note: *Prior to the arrival of the students, set up a tombstone of some type in the front of the room. This can be as simple as a drawing on a whiteboard or a picture on a PowerPoint slide. If you have the time, you could create one out of cardboard. Instructions can be found here:* [*https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-4/*](https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-4/)*. With a little planning, you may be able to purchase one at a discounted price after Halloween. If you happen to know someone in the tombstone business, see if they will allow you to borrow a tombstone long enough to teach your lesson.*

*As the students enter the room, do not comment about the tombstone. As you begin teaching the lesson, it is important to highlight the seriousness of the subject and remind them to act accordingly. Throughout the lesson, point to the gravestone, using it as an illustration.*

*Optional visual: If the timing is appropriate, have your leaders dress in black and stage a graveside service to make it even more realistic. Begin the lesson by having the adult leaders walk by the gravestone with their heads down and take their seats. If you choose to do this, make sure to instruct the actors to avoid any type of humor or lightheartedness. Be particularly sensitive to anyone who may have lost a loved one recently. As you prepare to teach the lesson, begin with the following script.*

“Here lies...,” you fill in the blank. It could be a loved one, a close friend, a classmate, or a neighbor. It could have come unexpectedly, or it may have resulted from a long battle with an illness. But there you are, at the cemetery, staring at the name of this person you loved.

Now what? What do you do now? This doesn’t seem right. This hurts! As tears stream down your cheeks, you are not sure what the days ahead will be like without this person in your life. You need answers. You need help. Where do you turn? What is your next move?

Maybe you have been there. If not, it really is only a matter of time. Eventually, the death of a loved one invades all of our lives. And make no mistake, death is difficult to understand and can cause extreme pain in one’s heart. It’s important to have a proper perspective on this topic to move forward like God would want us to.

Tonight’s lesson is the second topic in a four-part series called *“Deal With It: A Biblical Approach to Tough Topics.”* In each of the four parts of this series, we will discover the biblical approach to some rather difficult topics. As you may have already guessed, the tough topic for tonight is death, specifically the death of a loved one.

In tonight’s lesson, we will be taking principles from Scripture and applying them to the topic of death. For those of us who are Christians, we have discovered that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bring hope to us when we are faced with the death of a loved one. For those who have not experienced this hope, our prayer is that you can find this hope too.

So, even if you are not ready to hear it yet, we are going to talk about how **death is not an end, but a beginning.** It is the beginning of your journey to find comfort. It could be that death is a beginning to what resembles a whole new way of life for you. It could be the beginning of your quest to help a friend who is hurting from the death of someone close to them.

Let’s start our walk through this difficult subject together by turning to a passage of Scripture that is heard at many funerals. Open your Bibles to the 23rd Psalm. *[Read Psalm 23:4.]*

LESSON CONTENT

The “valley of the shadow of death,” what does that mean? It sounds like a scene from a horror movie. Well, it’s certainly no walk in the park. What do you think the psalmist meant when he wrote the words “the valley of the shadow of death”?

Teacher’s Note: *Take a moment here to gain some student interaction with the question. Allow them to describe what they think is meant by this verbal illustration.*

The psalmist is describing the difficulties in our lives. Difficulties that could include the death of a loved one. The illustration is a very powerful one. In Psalm 23, we are given a picture of a shepherd leading his sheep to safety. In order to move the sheep from one field to another, the shepherd had to lead his flock through some valleys. In those valleys, surrounded by mountains on each side, it could be very dark.

Unfortunately for sheep, they do not see very well, especially in a dark valley. So, the sheep had to rely on the voice of the shepherd to lead them to safety. That is why the rod and staff provided comfort to the sheep. To feel the rod or the staff was to know the shepherd was close.

Teacher’s Note: *Optional visual: If you have chosen to bring a shepherd’s staff, show the staff as an illustration of the shepherd leading his sheep.*

The sheep could find comfort in the presence and the voice of the shepherd. The staff brought them comfort, because they knew and trusted the shepherd to lead them out of the darkness and into the light. Without the shepherd, the sheep would be in great danger. The staff provided comfort when the sheep were in an uncomfortable situation. The psalmist reminds us that the Lord acts like a shepherd for us and we can find comfort in the uncomfortable.

1. Find **Comfort** in the **Uncomfortable** (Psalm 23:4)

Imagine walking in a very dark alley in a big city all by yourself – not exactly a very comfortable situation, is it? Now, imagine taking a bit of a stumble at night in the dark hallway between your bedroom and the bathroom. Are you as scared in the hallway as you would be in the dark alley? Probably not, because you have people in your home that are there to keep you safe.

Now, in your mind, take yourself back to that dark alley. What if you were walking that alley with a group of elite military soldiers? You would feel pretty safe. To find comfort in the uncomfortable all depends on your present company. When it comes to the “valley of the shadow of death,” you want and need God to walk you through that valley. *[Have a student read Deuteronomy 31:6.]*

In this verse, Moses, the leader of Israel, was about to die and he told his people not to be afraid. Why? Because the Lord was always with them and would not leave them or forsake them.

Like the children of Israel, when someone dies, you are going to need the Lord to get through this difficult time, this dark valley in your life. Like a sheep in that valley, you will have trouble seeing what is ahead of you. You may feel confused, lost, and struggling to find your way. It is at that moment that you must realize how much you need the Shepherd. Listen to His voice, and let God comfort you. **Death is not an end, but a beginning** for you to experience God’s comfort in a way you never have before. God’s comfort will steady and guide as you settle into the new “normal.”

1. Rediscover **Normal** in the New **Normal** (Psalm 34:15, 17-18)

Teacher’s Note: *This portion of the lesson is designed to help the students understand what someone might be going through mentally. It may be hard to shift into this content and still maintain a compassionate tone. Use the portion of the five stages of grief at your discretion.*

Before we discover what the Word of God has to say about the “new normal” after someone has experienced the death of a loved one, it is important to understand some of the emotions that we tend to experience when someone dies. In her book titled *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross describes the five stages of grief. The five stages are:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Resolution

Death, when it finally happens, typically comes as a shock. Even if your loved one had a disease for a long period of time, there often is a stage of ***denial***. For some, denying the reality that they are going to lose their loved one is when the denial stage begins. For most, the denial stage begins when their loved one actually dies.

Then, as reality sets in, they can expect a fury of emotions. Outbursts of tears, pain inside your heart, and even ***anger*** can result from a death. The love for this person causes emotions to come out in a variety of ways. Everyone is different and will express their emotions in different ways. We will do well to remember this truth and not criticize someone who has experienced the death of a loved one for not “handling it” the way you think they should.

Because of the difficulty of wading through these emotions, many people begin a ***bargaining*** stage, praying prayers like, “Lord, if you would just bring my dad back I would...” But they know that they cannot make these types of deals, and as a result, the permanence of death begins to sink in. Before they know it, they could be battling ***depression***.

According to Kubler-Ross, depression is the stage right before ***resolution***. Depression can express itself in various ways. The person may no longer feel joy in favorite things, may have a desire to cry or may experience a heavy heart. The grief process is different for each person. Some struggle for a long period of time before they feel like they can go on to their “new normal” life.

For some, normal life seems far away, and it takes a long time to wade through the waters of grief. For others, they are able to move on more quickly to the new normal. It may be personality, circumstance, or even a spiritual battle, but each person is different in dealing with their grief.

So, does God give us any hope in our grief? What does He say about finding the new “normal”? Listen to the comforting words of the psalmist. *[Read Psalm 34:15, 17-18.]* There is hope! The God of the universe, the One Who loves your lost loved one more than you will ever love them, hears the cry of the brokenhearted. In the middle of the despair of your loss, the Lord hears your cry.

Quite possibly, the most important step to take in your grief is to cry out to God. Those who have lost a loved one will often tell you the hardest time is when people move on, and you are left in your pain. After the funeral, the meals brought to the house, the cards, and the phone calls have started to fade away, the heavy feeling of emptiness lingers. You still hurt for your loss, but it seems like everyone else has gone on with their lives. Now, in that dark valley that seems to have turned a shade darker, what do you do?

You pray! You cry out to God! You plead with Him to begin to heal your heart. You ask God to show you how **death is not an end, but a beginning** of the “new normal,” a normal that He will help you navigate. While your heart is breaking, the Lord is near. The “new normal” includes a greater reliance on the presence of God when you feel the emptiness in the depths of your soul because of your broken heart.

Maybe you haven’t experienced a tragedy like this personally, but you know someone who has. What should you ***say*** to them? Maybe a better question, what should you ***not say*** to them? How do you show love to the one who has lost a loved one?

1. Love**One** Who Lost a Loved **One** (Job 2:11-13)

The Book of Job records the account of some friends who were presented with the chance to be a comfort to a man named Job. Listen to how they approached the situation. Keep in mind, the passage we are about to read comes from the second chapter of Job and includes some names that are a little different than what we are used to. *[Have a student read Job 2:11-13.]*

Here is a little background to this scene. Job had just lost everything. His possessions, his children, and even his good health…all gone. Job didn’t know this, but Satan proposed the idea to God that Job was only good because of all he had. This was quite the test. And as you can imagine, upon losing his possessions, and especially his children, Job was grieving.

So, what did his friends do? They made it a point to find him, they cried with him, and they sat with him. Let’s dive a little deeper into each of those actions to show how you can help show love to someone who lost a loved one.

1. Do **something** (Job 2:11)

First, these friends got together to find their friend to comfort him. They made it a priority to get together. They were concerned for their friend and they wanted to comfort him in his grief. Now, you might say to yourself, “Big deal, they ***went*** to their friend.” It is a big deal!

Sometimes, when a friend or a loved one loses a loved one, we are tempted to give them space, stay away, or “give them time.” While there is a time for that, it is important to make an effort to show you care and do what you can to comfort a friend. Do something! Help your family make a meal for their family. Offer to collect notes and assignments from their teachers while they are away from school. Look for a need and be available to fill that need. Do something, even if that something is to just show up when needed.

1. Be **sensitive** (Job 2:12; Romans 12:15)

Next, these friends cried with their friend. Scripture calls for us to weep or mourn with those who weep. *[Read Romans 12:15.]* Even if you are not a “crier,” you still can empathize with your friend. There is a time to weep (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Share in their pain. Be sensitive to what they are going through. Give them grace even if they push you away. Pray for them. Be sensitive to their pain as you approach them and spend time with them. While there is a time to weep, there is also a time to be quiet (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

1. Be **Quiet** (Job 2:13)

Lastly, we find what is probably the best advice. Be quiet. These friends, here in the beginning, did the wise thing and just sat with Job. They saw Job didn’t want to talk about it, so they just sat there in silence. Many times, your friend might just want you to be there. He or she might just need a shoulder to cry on and an arm to lean on. You can do that. You can be that comfort for a friend, just by being there. So, know when it is time to simply be quiet.

Unfortunately, Job’s friends didn’t stop with these three things. If you read the whole Book of Job, you will discover that, after getting started so well, they ***really*** messed up when they started ***talking***. Even the best intentions and actions can be ruined if you are not careful. Guard your tongue and be careful of the advice you may give. You may be trying to help but be careful. Some advice, even given with good intentions, can be hurtful.

As a side note, here are some more examples of things you should ***not say,*** even if well-intentioned.

Teacher’s Note: *Feel free to add or subtract from this list based upon your time frame or situation.*

1. “God wanted to take him home to be with Him.” or “It is all part of God’s plan.” This is not helpful and won’t help that person’s view of God. It might even add to the person’s resentment towards God.
2. “I can imagine how you feel.” No, you can’t. Please don’t compare this to your pet dying or your distant relative passing away. If you have experienced a close relative dying you know that pain is felt differently. Everyone’s pain is different because it is uniquely their own. Although you are trying to sympathize, don’t try to compare.
3. “I’m hurting too.” Now is not the time to share ***your*** pain. It is time to care for the person in front of you, to ***share in their*** pain. It’s not about you, it’s about them right now. Be sure not to selfishly shift the focus.

If you don’t know what to say, then say very little; that is your best option. If you can, in lieu of talking, act. Sending meals, prayers, and hugs might be a solution to your loss for words. If you can’t seem to find the right words to express your love for them, show them you care. Mourn with those who mourn.

As we close this section of the lesson, let’s watch a helpful video.

Teacher’s Note: *Show “Mourning Booth” by the Skit Guys.* [*https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-1/*](https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/42-1/)*.*

CONNECTION

Facing death and encouraging others who are faced with the death of a loved one is difficult. We began our time together staring at a tombstone so we could focus on the seriousness of death. *[Direct the attention of the students to the tombstone.]* Imagine if that stone had your name on it. A discussion about death should make us pause long enough to consider our own death.

The tombstone tells a story. It gives the birth date when the person entered the world and cried for the first time. It has the death date when the person left this world with the cries of those who loved him/her. In between the two dates of birth and death is a dash. Yep, that’s it. A dash represents an entire life on earth. The Bible describes this life as “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (James 4:14) Life goes quickly, and then what?

In dealing with death, the first question you must ask is, “Am I ready?” Are you ready for the day when your heart beats its last? Are you ready for what happens after that “dash” is over? You need to be because there is more to life than life on earth.

Throughout this lesson, we have been saying that **death is not an end, but a beginning**. Sure, it is the beginning of your journey to find comfort. Sure, it is the beginning of a new normal. Yes, it is the beginning of your opportunity to comfort a friend, but is that it? Where is the hope in that? How can that be true? *[Read Hebrews 9:27-28.]* Scripture is clear. Death is not the end; there is something after death. In this passage, the comparison is to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

More than two thousand years ago, Jesus’ death provided a new beginning to anyone who will believe. He died so you could have a new start; so that your sins could be forgiven. His death was not the end either. He rose from the dead so that we can be saved from sin. *[Read Romans 10:9-10.]*

Believing in Jesus for salvation will give you confidence that your eternity is in the Lord’s hands. It will allow you to live confidently, knowing you are saved from eternal torment and given an eternal home in heaven. When you know that your own death is just the beginning of an eternity with God, you can boldly share the comfort of knowing Him with those who are desperately searching for the kind of comfort only God can provide. *[Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.]*

If you have trusted Christ as Savior, if you are a Christian, the Christlike thing to do is to be a comfort to those who are in need of comforting. When others need comfort, point them to the God of all comfort. What brings comfort to those dealing with death is the promise of “*salvation,*” the “*deliverance from the power and effects of sin through the person and work of Jesus Christ.”* So, you can find comfort in the uncomfortable, rediscover normal in the new normal, and love those who have lost loved one, but be sure that you are ready for your death because **death is not an end, but a beginning.**

CHOICE

If you are struggling with the death of a loved one, there are no amount of words that will heal the pain you are experiencing. Our prayer for you tonight is that you can begin to see the One Who loves you more than you can imagine, the God of all comfort, the Shepherd who walks with you through the valley of the shadow of death, the One Who died and rose again so that **death is not an end, but a beginning.** In your pain, will you call out to Him and ask Him to be the God of all comfort in your life? Your prayer to Him might be as simple as,

“Dear God, I don’t know what to pray. I just need to know You are there and that you care. Help!”

If that is it, that’s fine. Start there. God is a God of comfort.

If you know someone who is struggling through the pain of the death of a loved one, will you make a commitment to point them to the God of all comfort? Will you do something? Will you be sensitive? When appropriate, will you simply be quiet? Your prayer tonight could be something like this:

“Dear God, my friend is struggling. Please be the God of all comfort in her life. And God, I don’t know what to say to her. I don’t know what to do. Please help my actions and words to demonstrate the love You have for her.”

NEXT STEPS

When someone you know loses a loved one, you can do something; you can be a comfort to them. Ask yourself, “What can I do? How can I point them to the God of all comfort?” Here is a list of ways that you can practically be a comfort to someone who has lost a loved one. Choose one that will be your way to be a comfort to them.

● Pray daily.

● Run errands.

● Make a meal.

● Babysit or watch younger children.

● Watch or take care of family pets.

● Sit and ***listen*** to them.

● Do an activity they enjoy (a sport, a game, take a walk, etc.).

● *[Insert something else you can do.]*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**1. What is your experience with death?** *(The goal of this question is to help each other understand how the others in the group view death. Some may have had a parent or sibling die. Others may have only been to funerals of distant relatives that they did not know well or even at all. Some may have never even been to a funeral. For those who have, the funerals could have been as a result of sudden, shocking circumstances or after a long, well-lived life. Be sensitive when asking this question. It is not designed to drag up difficult memories but to help all the members of the small group understand each other better. With this knowledge, you will know how to better minister to the students in your small group.)*

**2. In what ways have you seen others prepare for death?** *(While death, for many, seems like such a long time away, take this time to focus on preparation. Allow the students to talk about practical preparation like buying grave plots, making wills, saving money, etc. But, be sure to ask how someone can be spiritually prepared for death. If you have a student that is unsure about his/her relationship with God, take the opportunity to have a Gospel conversation and invite him/her to trust Christ.)*

**3. What action steps will you take to comfort someone who has lost a loved one?** *(Refer to the list that was given at the end of the lesson. Remind your small group that the list is designed to help them have a plan for being a help to someone who has lost a loved one. How they actually act will depend upon the specific circumstances. If a student has a better idea, allow him/her to share it. If they have more than one way, encourage them to share that too. As the small group leader, be sure to share your plan too.)*