

**Explanatory Notes:****WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER DIES****Message title:** When a Family Member Dies**Topic:** Grief; Loss of a spouse.**Bible Verses:** John 11:17-44, CEV**Introduction:**

We have been speaking about the joys and troubles of marriage and families. With love, faithfulness and forgiveness, a man and a woman can create a beautiful life together. But the same love that brings great joy to marriage brings great heartbreak when one partner dies. Suddenly, our whole life changes. The person we loved so deeply and spent our life with is gone. Many people who face the loss of a family member lose hope. They can't imagine life without their husband or wife. They are filled with despair, anger and loneliness. Why would God take their spouse away from them? Where are they now? Are they suffering? Are they happy? Will we ever see them again?

Jesus Christ gives great hope to people who face death and suffering. How is that? What makes Jesus so special to believers? How can you and I find hope and comfort in Jesus? That is what we want to consider today.

**1. Jesus Gives Eternal Life**

The following is a story from the Bible. It tells us about the death of Lazarus, Jesus' close friend. Jesus hears of Lazarus' death while he is in a distant place. He goes to the village where Lazarus lived with his sisters Mary and Martha. This is what happened when Jesus arrived:

*When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died.*

*When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she*

**Reflection Questions:**

- How do people in your culture recognize death? (Burial? Cremation? Ceremonies? Weeping?)
- How do people honor the memory of the deceased person? (Do they tell stories about the person's life?)
- What rituals do they practice? (For example, in some cultures, people wail loudly, while in other cultures people are silent)
- What emotions do they experience? (Are they sad? Angry? Happy?)
- What do they say about death? (Is death the end? Is there an afterlife?)
- How do people treat the living spouse of someone who has died? (Do they comfort him? Do they avoid him?)
- What do they say? (Do they say it was God's will? Do they say words that will)
- How are Christian practices different from non-Christian practices?
- Are current Christian practices and attitudes about death in your culture consistent with Christian teaching?

How do your answers to the questions above agree or contradict Christian teaching? If cultural practices and Scripture agree, how can you use your culture's practices to draw your listeners' attention to the gospel? If they contradict, how can you show your listeners in an appealing way that the good news of Jesus offers hope to

*went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask."*

*Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again!" Martha answered, "I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised."*

*Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?"*

*"Yes, Lord!" she replied. "I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world."*

John 11:17-27, CEV

From this story we discover that Jesus offers eternal life to everyone who believes in him and follows him. If they die before he returns, they will live again. And if they are alive when he returns, they will never experience death.

Sometimes generous people arrive with free food at villages where people are starving. The villagers drop everything they are doing. They run to get the free food, because if they don't, they will die of starvation. They are filled with joy because now they have food to eat. They will live another day.

Jesus offers more than life for one more day. He offers us a life that will never end! We should run to him to obtain this life. We should believe in him and follow him.

## 2. Jesus loves us!

Now listen to what happened next:

*After Martha said this, she went and privately said to her sister Mary, "The Teacher is here, and he wants to see you." As soon as Mary heard this, she got up and went out to Jesus. He was still outside the village where Martha had gone to meet him. Many people had come to comfort Mary, and when they saw her quickly leave the house, they thought*

your people?

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### Some definitions:

**Bereavement:** the experience of losing a loved person to death.

**Grief:** the conflicting emotions we experience as we go through the process of bereavement.

### There are various stages of grief:

**1. Shock:** we feel numb; we can't believe the person is really dead; we burst out into tears; we have difficulty thinking clearly; it is difficult for us to do our usual tasks.

**2. Yearning:** we experience intense feelings of desire for the person to be present; we spend much time thinking about the person; we remember the times we spent with the person; we dream about the person or think we have seen them; we hope they will return;

**3. Despair:** we do not see purpose in life; we have difficulty understanding what life can be like if the person is not with us.

**4. Reorganization:** We begin to find hope for the future; we find meaning in life again even though the person is gone; we replace the emotions and behaviors of the previous stages with emotions and behaviors that are more appropriate to our new life without the deceased person.

### Other thoughts that grieving people experience:

- "This is my fault."
- "This is God's fault."
- "I wish I would have shown more love to the person."

The stages of grief are normal and healthy. It is not wrong to experience any of these feelings.

*she was going out to the tomb to cry. So they followed her.*

*Mary went to where Jesus was. Then as soon as she saw him, she knelt at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

*When Jesus saw that Mary and the people with her were crying, he was terribly upset and asked, "Where have you put his body?"*

*They replied, "Lord, come and you will see."*

*Jesus started crying, and the people said, "See how much he loved Lazarus."*

*Some of them said, "He gives sight to the blind.*

*Why couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?"*

John 11:28-37, CEV

Many people throughout the world think that God does not care about human suffering. They think that we are left to suffer while God is far away in heaven, safe and undisturbed.

The Bible shows us a very different picture of God. Jesus, the Son of God, had deep love for Lazarus. He considered Lazarus a close friend. Lazarus' death moved Jesus to sob loud tears of sorrow.

This doesn't mean Jesus was weak. It means that the love Jesus has for us is very strong. He loves us enough to cry for us when we suffer. He showed us that it is acceptable to cry when someone we love dies. By crying we show how much we love the person who died.

**Jesus loves you as much as he loved Lazarus.** He knows your suffering. He is saddened when you are hurt. What a comfort to know that the One who made the universe cares for you! What better friend and comforter could we have than God himself?

But there is more: Listen to the rest of the story.

### **3. Jesus has power over death!**

*Jesus was still terribly upset. So he went to the*

It is not wrong to engage in these behaviors. The grieving process can take a year or more. Grief may return briefly at any moment, even years later.

But some people get stuck in their sadness. They are unable to move past their grief. They cannot develop a normal life without their family member. These are the people who need the loving help of wise and capable counselors to help them discover new hope for their lives.

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#### **Message Idea:**

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says that God comforts us so that we can comfort other people with the comfort we have received. Maybe you or some mature Christian you know has lost a family member. You could prepare a message so that your listeners can hear a personal testimony of how the good news of Jesus helped someone through the grieving process.

Testimonies are very powerful. They are the stories of God's power and love at work in the lives of real people. We encourage you to include testimonies as part of your broadcasts.

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#### **Bible verses commonly used in funerals:**

##### **Romans 8:18-39:**

We suffer and groan, but God gives us hope. God works everything for our good, and nothing can ever separate us from his love.

##### **1 Corinthians 15:**

*tomb, which was a cave with a stone rolled against the entrance. Then he told the people to roll the stone away. But Martha said, "Lord, you know that Lazarus has been dead four days, and there will be a bad smell."*

*Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you had faith, you would see the glory of God?" After the stone had been rolled aside, Jesus looked up toward heaven and prayed, "Father, I thank you for answering my prayer. I know that you always answer my prayers. But I said this, so that the people here would believe that you sent me." When Jesus had finished praying, he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" The man who had been dead came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of burial cloth, and a cloth covered his face. Jesus then told the people, "Untie him and let him go."*

John 11:38-44, CEV

What power Jesus has! Jesus did not go through an elaborate ritual or ceremony to prepare for this miracle. He didn't fast and light candles for forty days. He simply prayed to God his Father and then spoke. With only a few words, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus proved that he has power over death.

**Now let's think for a moment what this story means:**

**a. Jesus, who has power over death, loves us very much and offers us eternal life.** He is concerned for us. He wants to destroy death forever. He wants to free us and our family members from the power and fear of death. He wants to give us a life that never ends.

**b. This gives us hope for the future.** If we believe in Jesus and follow him, we will live forever. Even if we die, we will be alive. And Jesus will raise us to new life when he returns. He will do this for everyone who believes in him. We do not need to fear death. Nor do we need to fear when a family member dies. If they believe in Jesus, they are

Jesus' resurrection gives us meaning for this life and hope for life after death.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:**

People who died will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns. We do not need to despair as unbelievers do.

alive with him in heaven. We will see them again when Jesus comes and raises all people from the dead.

**c. It also gives us strength and meaning for today.** Since we know Jesus, we can face every painful situation of life, even the painful loss of a family member. Jesus loves us and he is powerful. He will draw near to us, comfort us, and give us strength. Nothing can ever separate us from his strengthening, comforting love. The Bible says,

*I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!*

Romans 8:38-39, CEV

*[Producer: Conclude with an appropriate prayer for people who are suffering the loss of a family member.]*