

Death & Dying

INTRO: If you knew that that you only had 7 days to live, how would you want to spend that time?

- not to be alarmist, but you don't know if you have even seven days left!

EX: This awareness was first forced upon me in a personal way when I was working construction work in the summer before my senior year of college, and witnessed a co-worker be killed in a work accident – “You only go around once, so you've got to grab for the gusto while you have the chance” was a popular beer commercial at that time.

Barring accidents, why do people die? (Discuss) We don't really know the answer to that question; there are various theories:

- (1) genetic programming – the cells of the body can renew themselves a limited number of times
- (2) damage theories – our bodies simply wear out because of stress, and wear and tear .
- (3) theological theory – death is the result of the curse of sin (Gen 3:19); other theologians point out that this is only implied; it is never stated that man would live forever in his earthly state

DENIAL AND ANXIETY

We live in a death-denying society

EX: our funeral rituals – “doesn't he look natural”

Language – “pass away...went to sleep”

Cemetery vs. perpetual care garden

Hospital staff response to Kubler- Ross' research

(DISCUSS) How does this denial of death affect how we live our daily lives?

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

(Discuss) What is your earliest memory of a death? Young children have an incomplete understanding of death

- between the ages of 5 and 7 years, most children come to understand that death is irreversible and final
- adolescents have an adult understanding of death, but are often hesitant to express their grief
- adults begin to realize the limits of their mortality in middle years; they begin to view time differently, in terms of “how long do I have left?”, rather than “how old am I?”

PROCESS (STAGES) OF DYING

Kubler-Ross’ research, in addition to raising awareness of death, showed us that dying is a process

- her model (pp. 468-469) doesn’t fit every death; not everyone goes through all the stages in this order
- the model is often applied to the grieving process EX: Ben Williams and injured athletes
- a significant factor in the grief process is the dying trajectory

EX: sudden, unexpected vs. long, protracted (anticipatory grief)

GRIEF (p. 470)

What is grief? How do we grieve? (Discuss)

When do we grieve? (Discuss)

How long do we grieve? (Discuss)

HOPE

Kubler-Ross emphasized the importance of hope; WHERE DO PEOPLE FIND HOPE?

- some don't, but for many, hope in the face of death comes from their faith tradition; there has been research that suggests that people with a religious faith may experience less death anxiety
- different traditions attach different significance to death & suffering

EX: reincarnation, resurrection (I COR 15:20-23)