

Lesson 12: Coping

TLO: Identify how people use religion to cope in a healthy way.

ELOs: None

Case Study:

A Chaplain and a grieving woman are sitting together in the Chaplain's office.

Woman: I still can't believe it's been six months that John's been gone.

CH: It's gone fast.

W: Well, to be honest I was, like, in a fog for three months after he died. It was just crazy. It's like I wasn't even real. There were people coming through the house, it seemed, like I didn't even know. And like there wasn't a day and night, it was just a constant gray.

CH: Wow, what a strange and difficult time. You say there were people in your house you didn't know?

W: I think they were Family Readiness Group people. The FRG was great. They, like, had a duty roster, and people were constantly there – cooking, taking care of kids. I don't think I did anything for, like, a month.

CH: And that was helpful.

W: Well, I was a mess. My mom had to leave shortly after the funeral – she has a job she can't afford to lose. I know I should have picked myself up faster, but I was, just in shock. I don't know how long that was.

CH: I remember. I must have missed some things, because it looked to me like you were doing very well. I remember thinking that when the dust settles we should talk so that other wives could learn from what you did. I thought you had it all together. Guess that doesn't say much about my insight.

W: No, you were a great comfort. When I think back to some of those days, your voice is often a key part of the memory. It was like your prayers were the one thing I was hearing and remembering from those days. I know you were praying to God, but it seemed like your voice was God speaking to ME. It's part of what helped me start moving forward...I hate even thinking about those days.

CH: Well, that's good to hear. In terrible times like that I never know exactly what should be done, despite the training I've gotten. But I don't want to make you go back to those dark days. How do you feel like you're doing now?

W: Well...not so bad, really. Sometimes I even sleep through the night. (laughs)

CH: Only sometimes, eh? How sometime?

W: Oh, the nights are the worst. Everything seems so lonely. And I dream of John again and again. Sometimes it's really horrible. I hear him screaming. Other times I rerun some good times we had, and then I wake up and feel so lonely. So sometimes I don't even go to bed, but fall asleep on the couch.

CH: Hmmm. You're carrying a load. But how do you feel during the day?

W: Really, not so bad. Once the kids are awake, there's work to do, feeding, playing, dressing. Once we're off into the day, things sometimes feel pretty normal.

CH: Well, that's not too bad. You've really done so well...Which raises the question I've thought I should ask you sometime. What are you glad you did that helped you keep moving forward through this time?

W: Well, just kept breathing... (laugh). I'm not sure I thought through a plan or anything. I just kept living...and gradually things have gotten a little better.

CH: Well that's good to hear. Sounds like you're just wired to get better as long as you keep breathing. Looking back, is there anything that, in retrospect, was really helpful?

W: Well, let me think. Friends have been just great. Some of my friends really pitched in. I was worried some of them might lose their own marriages; they were spending so much time with me. But I'm glad I had them.

CH: Very interesting.

W: And I really have enjoyed the Women of the Chapel Bible Study on Tuesday mornings. That was your idea!

CH: You sure? Great, I'll take credit.

W: Well, that's been such a great time to just come and unhook. And two women I met there have become close friends. Sarah Jones lives right down the block, and we hang out often. Our kids play really well together. I'm not sure we "did" anything, but it's a good thing, one way or the other.

CH: So what's next?

W: I don't know. Really, I think I'm just maintaining...But you're right, I probably ought to think about what I'm doing now. I've thought about going back to school. I always intended to get an MBA.

CH: An MBA? Wow, that's a major goal.

W: Well I majored in economics at college, and thought I'd become a company financial officer or money manager. But John was headed into the infantry and so I just put all that on the back burner when I got married and John headed to Fort Benning.

CH: Have you really thought of that? Where would you start down that road?

W: I guess I'd just start looking at schools. I've got the money now, I guess. John had SGLI as well as a private life insurance policy. He was always such a planner. I thought he was crazy.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What coping methods do you see this woman has utilized in adjusting to her husband's death?
- 2) How does the Chaplain help build her coping?
- 3) What is "pastoral" about this conversation?
- 4) Is there anything the Chaplain said or didn't say that could have taken this conversation down another helpful direction?
- 5) If you were this Chaplain, what else would you like to ask or say that might help this woman cope more effectively?