

Lesson Four  
*Our Christian Response to Blessings and Challenges*

## When We Outlive Our Relatives

### Goals

- To understand the feeling of pain and the feeling of being forgotten that afflict many of the elderly.
- To learn how to apply God's Word to comfort the elderly and the lonely.

### Suggested reading

Brian Terrell and Ron Koehler III, *Survival Guide for Being Alone* (Northwestern Publishing House, 1996).

### Life example

Jane is a 98-year-old nursing home resident you have volunteered to visit on a regular basis. She gets around fairly well for someone her age: when she leaves the home, she can get by with just a walker. Although she is in good health and is mentally sharp, she is often sad because she feels so alone.

Most of the members of Jane's immediate family are dead, and she has outlived her friends. Her husband died 24 years ago, and last year her only child, a son, died at age 75. The closest surviving family member is her 54-year-old grandson who lives two thousand miles away. Even those who entered the nursing home when she did, 13 years ago, are all gone.

Besides your weekly visit, her only other regular visitor is her sister's granddaughter, who visits once a month.

### Reflections of faith

1. What kinds of things do you think Jane thanks God for?
  
2. What thoughts might trouble Jane as she contemplates God's plan for her?

### Light from the Word

1. In **Ecclesiastes 12:1-5**, the wise teacher describes the aging process by using a series of interesting metaphors. He compares village life on a cloudy and gloomy day to the life of an aged person. See how many of the metaphors you can identify. You might refer to The

People's Bible commentary *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* by Roland Cap Ehlke, pages 118-122 (Northwestern Publishing House, 1988) for a more complete explanation.

- The sun, moon, and stars grow dark.
  
- The keepers of the house tremble.
  
- The strong men stoop.
  
- The grinders cease.
  
- Those looking . . . grow dim.
  
- The doors to the street are closed.
  
- Men rise at the sound of birds, but the songs are faint.
  
- The person is afraid of heights.
  
- Dangers are in the streets.
  
- The almond tree blossoms.
  
- The grasshopper drags himself along.
  
- Desire no longer is stirred.

With the words “Remember your Creator . . .” the inspired writer encourages us to keep God’s Word in mind and constantly apply it to the changing conditions of our lives.

2. The picture of the aging process presented in *Ecclesiastes* is not very encouraging. Yet we know that God works his good in all things. What blessing comes to us through this process in which our bodies weaken and our powers fail?

3. How does remembering our Creator offer special comfort to us as we age?

## **Breakout/discussion**

As you imagine your weekly visits with Jane, consider the following:

- What are the most difficult aspects of your visits?
- What are the most rewarding aspects of your visits with Jane?
- For a moment, think about Jane's life at the age of 98, and think also of the aging process picture given in Ecclesiastes. How might this influence your attitude toward the elderly?

## **Life example**

Although she shares her feelings with very few people, Jane has become very bitter toward God. She doesn't even want to talk to her pastor about how lonely and worthless she feels. Though her thoughts are saturated with memories of good times, the thought of death has marred every one of them. She tells you this because of the Christian compassion you have shown and because she knows that you won't become preachy with her.

## **Reflections of faith**

Jane is feeling forgotten. She is obsessed with death and angry that God lets her live while he has taken others to heaven. She is also afraid of being left more alone and of what might happen in the future.

How can you help her?

## **Light from the Word**

The following is a list of passages that you might study with Jane to give her encouragement. Summarize the comfort and hope each passage gives.

- **Psalm 23:4**
- **Psalm 42:11**
- **Psalm 48:14**
- **Psalm 73:23,24,28**

- **Matthew 11:28**
  
- **Romans 8:28**
  
- **Romans 12:4,5**
  
- **Galatians 6:10**
  
- **Ephesians 2:19,20**
  
- **1 Peter 5:7**

### **Let's think about the lesson**

1. Loneliness isn't experienced only by the very elderly. What thoughts or life experiences trigger feelings of loneliness in you?
  
2. What temptations do you struggle with when loneliness strikes?
  
3. What promises from God's Word are particularly comforting to you in your times of loneliness?