

LESSON FOUR: THE FACE OF LIFE

October 21, 2003, was an interesting day in the life of people who live in the United States of America. On that day, two legislative actions were taken that directly affect life. The United States Senate passed a law that made partial-birth abortion illegal. It was a victory of sorts, because it was the first major pro-life action taken in this country in thirty years. While that was happening, the Florida State Legislature took action that empowered the Governor to replace a feeding tube for Terri Schiavo so that intravenous feeding could be resumed. The woman, now 39, has been in a persistent vegetative state for years. Most doctors maintain that people in such a condition have no cognitive functions. Her husband had sought the removal of the feeding tube since 1998, because he claimed she didn't want to be kept alive artificially.

PRAY: Father in heaven, You created this world and all life in it. Human life is so precious to You that You sent Your Son, Jesus, into the world to suffer and die and rise again to save human life. Teach us, O Lord, to seek Your face always. Help us to be Your instruments to communicate Your Gospel that leads to life eternal. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: It's a jungle out there. Just ask Jay Rathman. He was hiking on one of the wilderness areas near his northern California home. Passing along a rocky ledge, he sensed movement beside his face. A timber rattlesnake struck, just missing his right ear. Its fangs got snagged in the wool of Rathman's turtleneck sweater, pulling the snake onto his shoulders. He grabbed it just behind the head with his left hand, as they both tumbled down the slope through the brush and rocks. In this eyeball-to-eyeball encounter, he discovered that snakes don't blink. In about 20 minutes, he was able to throttle the reptile.

Reading that hair-raising account reminds us how closely it resembles life on a daily basis. At the most unsuspecting moment, something strikes at us. We are knocked off balance by the assault. Who hasn't been tumbled head over heels by demands and deadlines? Who hasn't done battle with poisonous irritations on the slopes of over commitment, underachievement, and burnout? Who hasn't had to fend off surprise attacks from criticism that strikes at us like hungry predators and rip into us like needle-sharp claws? They are frequent and varied: physical pain, emotional trauma, relational stress, spiritual doubts, marital conflicts, occupational disappointments, financial reversal, or demonic assaults.

—J. Walter Cross, *Under No Delusions*, Bradenton, Florida.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Luke 7:11-17. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are provided to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Luke begins this account, “And it came about soon afterwards....” What happened earlier?

Jesus had been at His home in Capernaum. A centurion who lived in that same town had a slave who had been injured. The centurion was a believer in the God of Israel. A delegation of elders from the synagogue he attended came to Jesus to ask for healing on his behalf. Seeing the centurion's great faith, Jesus healed his slave.

2. Why do you think Jesus made the journey to Nain in the first place?

One must always remember that Jesus knows all things. There can be no doubt that He knew that a death occurred and that He had already developed a plan for what He was about to do. He timed His arrival so He would meet the funeral procession.

3. Why was such a great crowd of people accompanying the young man's mother?

She was a widow. This was the second time she left the gates of that city leading a funeral procession. The first time was for her husband's burial. Everyone in the city was aware of her circumstance. It was a case of double grief.

4. Why did Jesus feel such great compassion?

The Prince of Life met death head on. The compassion He felt was the same compassion He feels for all people because they have to die. It was the same compassion that moved Him to become a human in the first place.

5. Jesus told the mother not to weep. Why?

He was about to remove the cause of her grief. One must remember that whenever Jesus gave such a command, He always gave the ability to obey it immediately. He empowered her to stop weeping.

6. Why did Jesus touch the coffin?

First, it was not a coffin. The dead man was carried on a stretcher-like contraption. The Jews buried their dead on the same day they died. The body was placed in a rock tomb, not buried. They had no need for a coffin. Jesus touched the stretcher to signal to the crowd and the bearers to stop.

7. How did Jesus raise the man?

He raised him simply by the power of His Word. With that same Word He calmed storms and cast out demons. His Word is all-powerful.

8. What did Jesus do next?

He gave the young man back to his mother. That gesture eliminated her grief. It was a gift of life from the Prince of Life.

CHALLENGE: Discuss ways to enhance the quality of life for others. What can you do to visit the sick or aging? Is there a day-care program at your church where you can help with the children?

CLOSING THOUGHTS: A Turkish officer raided and looted an Armenian home. He killed the aged parents and gave the daughters to the soldiers, keeping the eldest daughter for himself. Some time later she escaped and trained as a nurse. As time passed, she found herself nursing in a ward of Turkish officers. One night, by the light of a lantern, she saw the face of this officer. He was so gravely ill that without exceptional nursing he would die. The days passed, and he recovered. One day, the doctor stood by the bed with her and said to him, "But for her devotion to you, you would be dead." He looked at her and said, "We have met before, haven't we?" "Yes," she said, "We have met before." "Why didn't you kill me?" he asked. She replied, "I am a follower of Him who said 'Love your enemies.'"

—L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 265-266.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Jesus, help us to seek Your face and see life through Your eyes. Lead us to see the value of life in others and help them to appreciate the fact that their life is a gift from You. Give us safety, protection, and prosperity in our time. In Your Name we pray. Amen.