

Aim of lesson

To help the young people think about old age and the prospect of death; how they can learn from and help old people.

Bible background

Leviticus 19:32

Preparation required

1. Think through the questions posed in the Students' Notes so that you can help the discussion along.
2. Decide how you are going to apportion the references. You may not have time in the lesson to look them all up.
3. Be prepared with practical suggestions of whom the young people could visit etc. if they would like to put into practice what they have learned

Suggested outline of lesson

The Bible's Attitude to Old Age

The Bible teaches that we should help and respect old people. Help the young people to come to this conclusion by looking up the passages in their notes and discussing them. (Widowed, bald, grey headed and lonely people aren't necessarily old, but may well be).

The young people should be encouraged to think in terms of people they know; in their own family, in the ecclesial family and those who are neighbours.

What can we learn from old people?

Try to get the young people to realise that older people have usually had more experience of life - seen more troubles, conquered more temptations than they will have done, so respect is often deserved, not just a duty.

Problems

Often old people can become cantankerous, forgetful or obstinate and keeping respect for them can be hard. Keeping your patience can also be difficult.

We can be in danger of pushing our own ideas because we think we know best or expecting them to be able to do the things we can do.

Help the young people to find answers to the problems they can see like keeping reminding ourselves how frustrating it must be not to be able to do what you used to be able to do; or thinking how we would like to be treated when we are that age. We should be prepared to listen to what the old person wants rather than doing what we think he or she wants.

Practical help

This bit is often easier. The young people will be able to make a long list of things they could do like shopping, housework, letter writing, entertaining, collecting library books, etc. Advice about things like gadgets and benefits is also important and if the young people feel ill-equipped in this area they should be encouraged to get advice in turn from others who know more about what is available. Little tips like knowing you can buy TV stamps and that hold-up stockings can be easier than tights can be invaluable.

Spiritual help

- When someone is living on their own they may miss being able to talk about the Bible and their problems.
- Really listening to an old person's fears, reading with them and praying with them can help both them and us.
- We should aim to help the old person to trust in God to see them through difficult times and know they have God's kingdom to look forward to after death.
- This of course, all has to be done tactfully so that we don't lay ourselves open to the accusation "It's all very well for you ..."
- Help them to feel useful. Even the most infirm can dictate letters and pray for others

Preparing for our own old age

This may seem a long way off for the young people but they should be encouraged to realise that our certainty of life after death, our total reliance on God and our acceptance of hard times is built up over a lifetime. It cannot be switched on at the age of 70.

Euthanasia

This is a modern topic, and is not dealt with directly in scripture, but it is worth discussing it with the young people. It is likely to crop up at school, and maybe one day they may face difficult decisions about their own life or that of a loved one.

You may like to discuss with them some relevant scriptural principles:

- Life is a gift from God. We cannot give it, and we have no right to take it - Job 12:10; Psalm 104:29-30. Life and death should be in God's hands.
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 tells us that there is 'a time to die'. There may come a point at which someone recognises that their life is complete, and would naturally come to an end - even when medically it might be possible to sustain existence a little longer. There seems no reason, scriptural or compassionate, to sustain - against the wishes of the person concerned - a life that would naturally end.
- There are several examples of suicide in scripture: Abimelech (Judges 9:54); Saul (1 Samuel 31:4); Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), and Judas (Matthew 27:5). Abimelech and Saul believed that they were dying, and their action (in the case of Abimelech, carried out by his armour-bearer) hastened their death. Ahithophel and Judas ended their lives when they would otherwise have lived. Although none of these actions is condemned, David's reaction in 2 Samuel 1:1-16 is informative: the man who claimed to have killed Saul at his own request - an Old Testament 'assisted suicide' was treated as a murderer.

These passages do not yield a hard-and-fast rule, to be applied rigidly, but do provide guidance that can be prayerfully considered.

Relevance to our lives

After considering the questions in the Students' Notes, the young people should be beginning to appreciate the role they can play in the lives of older people and how they can prepare for their own old age.

Prayer

It may be useful for each young person to 'adopt' an old one and make him or her a subject for regular prayer

Other suggestions for activities

The young people could take positive action to help some old people they know, such as arranging a visiting rota, organising a play or some singing for them, collecting library books or letter writing for someone who is housebound.