

Guide for Christian's Ministering to Suffering People

Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus was "moved with compassion" when he saw hurting or lost people. As His Disciples and his Body on earth, we extend his ministry in the power of the Spirit to our own circles of responsibility.

Below is a simple guide on some helpful ways to witness to our faith and share God's love with those who are hurting physically, emotionally and/or spiritually.

1. Prioritize the Ministry of Presence

In the Book of Job, his friends did their best work when they sat in silence with him for seven days. The "ministry of presence" means showing up without an agenda. While our understanding of God's providence and human suffering is important, we do not assume that our "answers" are primarily what they need. Their heart is hurting and they need to share that with someone who cares.

Be comfortable with silence: You don't need to fill every gap in conversation. Sometimes, just holding a hand or sitting in the room while they rest is the loudest form of love.

Be consistent: Many people visit right after a diagnosis or loss, but support often thins out as the weeks go by. Be the person who is still there in the "quiet" months.

Follow their lead: If they want to talk about their illness, listen. If they want to talk about the latest football game or a hobby to feel "normal" for an hour, lean into that.

2. Practice Active and Compassionate Listening

James 1:19 tells us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak." This is never more vital than at the end of life.

Avoid "At Least" statements: Phrases like "At least you lived a long life" or "At least you're going to a better place" can inadvertently minimize their current pain or fear.

Validate their feelings: If they express anger, fear, or doubt, don't correct them with a lecture. Instead, say, "I hear you, and it's okay to feel that way. God can handle your honesty. Talk to God about that."

Ask open questions. Instead of "How are you?" (which can feel heavy), try: "What is on your mind today?" or "What has been the hardest part of this week?"

3. Practical Acts of Service

Compassion is often best expressed through "faith with works" (James 2:17).

Be specific: Instead of saying "Let me know if you need anything," say, "I'm going to the grocery store on Thursday; what can I pick up for you?" or "I'd love to come mow your lawn this weekend."

4. Sharing the Hope of Faith

Sharing our hope is not about dismissing the reality of death, but about framing it within the victory of Christ on Easter. Be honest about the tragedy of death while pointing to the promise of renewal. We believe in the one who has conquered death. Focus on the hope of the Resurrection.

Remind them that God is especially close to those who suffer. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18). Remind them that God is not distant from their suffering; He is intimately acquainted with it through the Cross.

Scripture: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4) For the believer, death is a transition, not an end.

Offer a Scripture of hope: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)

Application: Ask, "How can I pray for you right now?" If they are too tired to speak, pray a simple prayer of peace over them, or read a Psalm (Psalm 23 and Psalm 121 are classic choices for a reason).

Do	Avoid
Listen more than you speak.	Explaining why God allowed this.
Ask before sharing a "miracle story."	Comparing their journey to someone else's.
Bring specific, practical help.	Offering unsolicited medical advice.
Embrace the tears and the sadness.	Forcing a "positive-only" attitude.
Focus on God's presence in the pain.	Treating them like they are already gone.