

pastoral care

As the leader of your Life group, you have the responsibility to make sure pastoral care happens. Pastoral care is a supportive relationship that empowers those in crisis or transition to grow in the midst of change. Studies show that most people turn to either their family or friends when needing help. Groups are like a "family of friends" which means people will likely share with their group when in times of need. It is important to remember that pastoral care is different from counseling. You are not responsible to make them happy, fix their problems, or make them behave a certain way. However, you are responsible to love, serve and bear with them.

The Bible and pastoral care

In the Bible, the Greek word for pastor is the same word used for people called shepherds. Therefore, by way of analogy pastoral care is "shepherding." It would be a good exercise for those facilitating pastoral care in a small group to be aware of how important this task is portrayed in the Bible. The following passages provide stories of good and misguided shepherds.

- Ezekiel 34:1-16
- Psalm 23
- John 10: 1-21
- Acts 20: 13-36
- I Peter 5: 1-4

Your spiritual gifts may not be in the realm of pastor or mercy or encouragement. Nevertheless, you can still practice some simple skills in order to facilitate care in your group.

How care needs are met in a group

- A basic way to care for others is to know their name and be interested in them. By remembering who they are, practicing active listening and asking good questions about their life, you can care for group guests and members.
- Every person needs their primary care needs met. Try to discern who needs primary care from you and/or someone in your group. (*Primary care consists of things like encouragement, prayer, support, notes, etc.)
- The group itself provides a broader base of care when there are special needs. This may include praying faithfully, providing meals when a family has a new baby or experiences some form of hospitalization, and even financial and/or emotional support when individuals lose their job or experience some other kind of loss.

Common forms of pastoral care

Prayer and Intercession

Never hesitate to pray for a person in need, even if it is over the telephone or in public. As a group, keep a list of prayer issues you are bringing before God.

Hospital Visits

Going to see someone who is sick, injured, or has just had surgery is a wonderful ministry. If possible, take along someone with a gift of mercy. At the hospital you may talk about the person's recovery, read the Bible and pray with them. A fifteen-minute visit can be incredibly meaningful.

People in Transition

Transitions are stressful, whether at birth, death, marriage, divorce or loss of a job, it is important to be mindful of these events in the life of group members. The group can offer ways to be helpful to members going through one of these events. Perhaps a meal, extra phone calls, a listening ear or babysitting would be a blessing to the person. You may also need to discuss with the group how the transition may impact the group.

Caring for the Grieving

Caring for the grieving is important when someone has lost a loved one, has been divorced (or is going through one), or has lost (or is having trouble finding) a job. Sometimes pastoral care is to simply be with them, love them, and remind them of resources that exist to help them take their next steps. Contact the office for a packed of grief booklets for those who have recently experienced a loss.

Dealing with crisis

Beyond these basics, there may be times of crisis. Crises may include marital problems, substance abuse, or mental/personality disorders. While you may provide some encouragement from God's word and with prayer, you may also need to refer them to a pastor and/or professional counselor. Talk to a pastor about the best option.

When someone is a danger to him/herself or others (such as a suicide threat or threats of violence), you will need to notify the police, paramedics or other appropriate emergency personnel immediately. Get the help of those who know what to do! You will also want to get emergency contact information for the person in a crisis.

Listed below are some questions to use if you find yourself in this situation.

Questions to use in assessing whether a person needs to be referred:

- Does the person seem to be having difficulty maintaining the basic functions of life?
- Has the person experienced marked weight loss or gain?
- Would you expect the person to be doing significantly better by now?
- Does the person's ability to cope seem to be on a definite downward spiral?
- Is the person becoming overly dependent on you?
- Is the person involved in any kind of abusive situation?
- Is the person behaving explosively or threatening violence?
- Has the person mentioned suicidal thoughts or wishes or behaved in a reckless, self-destructive ways?

If you find yourself in this position, then you will need to encourage them to get additional help.

How to refer someone:

1. Call a Pastor. You don't have to tell me who it is, but let me know the situation. We can talk about the best referral options. Pastor Steve and I typically will see people for 3 sessions then refer them if the need goes beyond our ability to help. Typically a pastor will be the first person to refer to, but there are times when someone's situation is better suited for a direct referral to a counselor or other provider.
2. Talk to the person. Let them know that you think they could benefit from additional help.
3. Help the person make the contact.
4. Deal with the person's refusal, if necessary.
5. Follow up with a Pastor.
6. Continue to provide care as a life group leader.

: active listening :

Listening is an important part of providing care. Actively listening to someone can be a great gift to that person. However, most of us are better talkers than listeners. Good listening takes practice and involves the following:

Keys to effective listening

1. **Focus.** Give all of your attention to the person. Don't think about what you are going to say next, rather, focus on what the person is saying and think of your response when they are finished.
2. **Respond.** Give both verbal and non-verbal responses to show the other person that you are listening. You may summarize what you have heard, reflect back what they are saying or simply say, "uh huh."
3. **Clarify.** By clarifying what the person says, you will avoid the trap of interpreting or guessing what they mean. Ask open-ended questions. This will keep the person talking and will assist them in making their own discoveries. Avoid using the word, "why", as it makes people defensive and can invalidate their feelings and what they have just shared.

Behavioral tendencies to avoid as a leader

Defensiveness

Value the opinions of the person bringing the concerns. If their approach was less than healthy, pick a time (perhaps not "in the moment" of conflict) when you can help them see how to share their concerns in a way that respects others rather than tearing them down.

Correcting Feelings

It isn't caring to tell people "You shouldn't feel that way." As caregivers, our job is to walk with them in the reality of what they are facing, rather than shaming them for the emotions they may feel. Perhaps they are still coming to understand their identity in Christ and you know certain feelings (i.e. guilt; defeat; etc.) could perhaps be avoided. Even so, let them grow as you show your support in their time of need.

Advice-giving

Often, people just want to express themselves. They may not be asking for ideas or solutions. Sometimes the advice given indicates a lack of understanding. If, after hearing them out, you believe the Lord has given you wise insight, ask (don't assume) if you can suggest a thought or two. Only do so if you believe they genuinely want your input.

When you are actively listening, there are several messages that you communicate:

- that the person is important
- that you respect that person
- that you desire to understand

Care Strategy Options

As the leader of your Life Group you have the responsibility to make sure pastoral care happens. Pastoral care is a supportive relationship that empowers those in crisis or transition to grow in the midst of change. Studies show that most people turn to either their family or friends when needing help. Groups are like a "family of friends" which means people will likely share with their group when in times of need. It is important to remember that pastoral care is different from counseling. You are not responsible to make them happy, fix their problems, or make them behave a certain way. However, you are responsible to love, serve and bear with them.

Start Strong:

Members show up to your small group.

- » Create, agree to, and sign a Life Group Covenant.
- » Think about: consistency, honesty, confidentiality, respect, prayer, & accountability.

I Thessalonians 2:8 = Make deep relationships a priority.

Hold to the Minimum:

Members attend your life group.

- » Know their names.
- » Know their spiritual condition.
- » Know why they have chosen your group.
- » Know their basic life circumstances.
- » If a person comes to your mind at any time, it is God's invitation to contact them. Give them a call.
- » Always be proactive in addressing issues, because they won't go away on their own.
- » Take a moment to record any new things about group members each week in a journal.

Proverbs 27:23 = Know your people.

Prepare for Issues:

Member comes to your LG looking dejected/distraught.

- » Contact the person with the obvious troubles ASAP.
- » Form subset groups during your meeting, and pull the person into yours to create a safer environment for them to share.
- » Appoint a person to greet members, and empower that person to care for people as they enter.
- » Commission someone who is connected to that member to contact them.

I Thessalonians 3:2 = Send those with natural connections.

Expect Prayer Needs:

Member mentions a serious prayer request.

- » Make room for prayer time in your meeting.
- » Pull them aside after the meeting to go deeper.
- » Remember their needs then ask questions or get testimonies during the week and in future meetings.
- » Emphasize confidentiality to encourage members to share their needs safely.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 = Be a partner that helps.

Connect with the Absent:

Member misses a couple meetings in a row.

- » With the intention to set up an appointment, call them.
- » Step out and visit their home.

Hebrews 10:24-25 = Encourage group meetings.

Lead the Socially Awkward:

Member is left out or doesn't connect/flow with others.

- » Lead them into targeted one-on-one connections.
- » Teach/talk on deliberately trying to connect with people you don't mesh with or know well.
- » Meet with the member privately to give social pointers.
- » Give them a task.

I Cor. 12:22-23 = Give greater attention to those with greater needs.

Correct the Negative:

Member speaks badly about friends or family.

- » Decide if it needs to be addressed publicly, privately, or both.
- » Refocus the group onto the positive and toward the people present, while offering to meet privately.
- » Meet with the member to focus them on proactively addressing their areas of frustration with others.

Ephesians 4:29 = Let our speech be helpful.

Titus 2:3&5 = Teach respectfulness.

Remember the Faithful & Stable:

Member shows up, contributes, and is doing great.

- » Direct them to areas of service, including the leading of their own Life Group.
- » For every action taken for an obvious need, make contact with someone who is not in obvious need.

I Corinthians 12:23-26 = Members should receive appropriate care.

Care outside of Group Time:

Member is in crisis.

- » Know that you don't have to do it alone. Call others as appropriate to get help.
- » Hospital visits; a 15 minute visit can be a wonderful encouragement.
- » Grief; Caring for those grieving can be as easy as simply being with them, listening, and loving them

Psalms 6:2-3 = Be merciful and heal me Lord for I am weak.

Scriptures to Help Care

2Timothy 3:16-17 = All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When caring for our Life Group Members, it is important to do all we can to know what God says in the Bible. Here are some passages grouped by topic. In the back of most modern Bibles, similar lists can be found.

GUIDANCE

John 16:13 Isaiah 58:11
Psalm 32:8 Psalms 37:23

CHILD TRAINING

Proverbs 22:6 Proverbs 19:18
Proverbs 29:17 Ephesians 6:4

PEACE OF MIND

Isaiah 26:3 Romans 5:1
Colossians 3:15 Psalm 4:8

FINANCIAL NEEDS

3 John 1:2 Philippians 4:19
Matthew 6:33 Luke 6:38

DIVINE HEALTH

Jeremiah 30:17 Matthew 9:35
I Peter 2:24 Psalm 103:3

MARITAL & FAMILY PROBLEMS

Psalm 101:2 Joshua 24:15
Ephesians 4:3, 32 Ephesians 5:33

LONELINESS

John 14:1 John 14:18
Psalm 46:1 Psalm 27:10

FORGIVENESS

Romans 4:4-8 I John 1:9
Colossians 3:12-14 Matthew 6:14-15

STRENGTH

Philippians 4:13 Isaiah 40:29
Psalm 27:1 Psalm 46:1

TRIALS OF LIFE

I Peter 4:12-13 Isaiah 43:2
Isaiah 26:3 Psalm 55:22

DEPRESSION

I Peter 4:12-13 Philippians 4:6-7
Psalm 147:3 Isaiah 40:31

DISCOURAGEMENT

Hebrews 10:35-36, Galatians 6:9
Psalm 138:7-8 II Corinthians 4:8-9

WORRY

I Peter 5:7 Philippians 4:6-7
John 14:1 Isaiah 41:10

CONDEMNATION

Romans 8:1 John 5:24
John 8:11 John 3:17-18

FEAR

Proverbs 3:24-26 II Timothy 1:7
Psalm 56:11 Psalm 91

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Almost every group will face some form of conflict. If there are never any conflicts in your group, perhaps people are not being authentic with one another. Conflicts may come in the form of dissatisfaction with the group or over the style of leadership. It may emerge as a personality clash between group members. It may be because the group is not ending on time, or the curriculum is boring, or an individual's expectations are simply not being met.

Conflict usually means your group is right on schedule in its development as a community. There can be no authentic community until there is some kind of painful strife. The key is to take some healthy steps in the resolution of that conflict.

Potential outcomes of conflict

Motivational results come from positive outcomes of conflict. Conflict can:

- ✦ be a means to both purify and clarify the group's vision
- ✦ help group members take ownership of their role in the group confirm a facilitator's calling to leadership
- ✦ strengthen relationships
- ✦ turns us toward God and His truth

On the negative side, when handled ineffectively, or when certain individuals choose to be unwaveringly difficult, a group may be seriously wounded or even split. But, this can be avoided in most groups.

Suggested strategies for dealing with conflict in a group

Create space to facilitate dialogue.

Provide opportunities for members to dialogue about conflict that exists in the group. Communicate to the group that conflicts are a normal part of group life and that group conflicts will be brought to the group to discuss.

Discern that conflict exists.

Pay attention to the words and feelings of people in your group. Especially as you move out of the "beginning" stage of group life, stay attuned to how people are responding to you and what is happening in the group. Look for sarcasm, cynicism, boredom, lateness, absenteeism and frustration.

Seek to clarify the issues at hand and affirm the need to address them.

By listening and asking good questions, you can get at what those who are dissatisfied are concerned over. Don't assume you know what the conflict is. Decide if your attempt at clarification needs to be public or private.

Decide the best time to deal with the conflict.

If this is an issue between you and one other person, or an issue between two group members and you are stepping in to facilitate, conflict resolution should not occur during group time. If, on other hand, a majority of the group needs to be involved in the discussion (if the issue has to do with "the group" as a whole), schedule an interaction during a group time when everyone is able to be there.

Use appropriate Scriptures and prayer to set the tone.

Start your time of conflict resolution by reading from passages like Ephesians 4:32-5:2; Colossians 3:1-17; Philippians 1:27, 2: 1-4; 1 John 4:7-21. Ask the Lord to guide your time of interaction.

Balance objective discussion with authentic sharing of feelings.

Group members need to be encouraged to not take things that are shared personally. (This may be especially true for you as the leader.) At the same time, individuals need to feel free to share honestly. Suggest to your group that they use "I" statements while avoiding statements like "You make me...", "You always...", "You never...", or "Whenever we...".

Facilitate an orderly interaction.

Do not allow things to get out of hand. Setting ground rules up-front can help with this; for example: 1) one person talks at a time; 2) the moderator will ask people to speak next; 3) attacking and blaming others is not permitted; 4) everyone is to be given a safe and fair opportunity to express their feelings/opinions openly and honestly. If discussion becomes too heated, remain in control, but end the discussion until more productive discussion can be resumed.

Ensure that those who disagree understand both sides of the issue.

Serve to clarify by saying, "So what I hear you saying is... Is that correct?" You may need to also say, "Not everyone may agree, but does everybody understand what _____ is saying?"

If need be, postpone the resolution for a week as everybody prays and processes the issues.

The time of communication may sufficiently clarify the issues to the point where corporate agreement can be made. But there may be enough difference of opinion that time may be necessary before conclusions can be drawn. During this time it will be essential for you to seek out a pastor or co-leader to help discern next steps. Your pastor may even need to attend your group to provide objective assistance for the sake of your group's survival, healing, and growth.

** Please also refer to, "**HOW TO RESOLVE SITUATIONS OF CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION IN A BIBLICAL WAY.**"

:: responding to child care issues ::

While child care may seem like a minor logistical issue, it can be an incredibly difficult and sensitive issue to parents and non-parents in the group. It is an important issue to discuss and deal with in your group. Here are some potential solutions.

- Pray about what the Lord would want for your group.
- If the host home is large enough and has a separate safer area rotate the responsibility of caring for the children.
- If the whole group is in favor, have the children participate in the group. Decide how much and how often the children will participate. Will they be in the whole meeting or just part of it? Can the group schedule an occasional meeting that focuses on the children? Be aware that having children in the group radically changes some of the group processes and benefits to adults. Still, there are some blessings to include children.
- Have someone care for the children during some or all of the group time. Encourage them to do a Bible Study with the children if age-appropriate.
- Select a "Child Care Coordinator" from among the group to facilitate the option your group selects. The job of the coordinator is not to do all the child care, but to include others in this important task.
- Discuss other creative approaches for what to do about the gift that children have in your group.
- Schedule regular times to discuss how the child care is working or not working in your group.