

Hospital Visit Shepherding
By Dr. Dan Doriani
"I was sick and you visited me" Matthew 25:36

Planning the Hospital Visit?

- Call or text ahead of time to confirm this is a good time for a visit.
- Does the person or family desire a visit? Is there a desire for privacy?
- What is the extent of illness? How many visitors do they have? Are they contagious?
- What is the person's spiritual condition?
- What is the depth of their relationship to the church? To The Lord?
- If there is a desire for privacy, a phone call with prayer may be appreciated.

Suggestions for a Visit:

- Generally, be brief. Ordinarily, under ten minutes, but use your judgement.
- Possibly take longer if the person is rather healthy, or bored, or gravely ill.
- We are listeners, priests, not entertainers.
- Focus on their story, not yours. The spotlight is on the sick person.

Elements of a Visit:

- Knock on the door and introduce yourself, as needed.
- The *Lord's Prayer* is a natural guide for your prayer for them.
Pray, "Your will be done." Pray for their needs – "give us this day..." Pray that they will not fall into the temptations that strike the sick.
- Read Scripture: Psalm 1, 62, 103. Psalms 13, 129 for lament. Ps 100 for thanks.
- Be careful with Psalm 23, since it is associated with death. It can scare people.
- Mention the availability of streaming of the Worship Services on Sunday.
- Minister to others in the room: Family, roommate, etc.
- With the dying: Go over the gospel, the hope. Be ready to help people face reality.

On Listening in the Hospital (and in other cases of need)

- Listening is essential for pastoral care that meets real needs. Several character traits foster the art of listening.
- Love releases empathy, so we see others as they are in their needs. Love deletes the ego's persistent question, "What do they think of me?" and genuinely attends to others.
- To listen silently is to deny oneself. We give up the right to sound wise or clever. We forego our story, our last word. We put another first. The spotlight is theirs.
- Courage watches the culture, the church, people without blinking.
- Hear them as they are, not as we prefer to imagine them. If someone says, "I was a bad father, mother" don't say, "No you weren't." Instead say, "What makes you say that?"
- Wisdom knows how to cut through blather until we hear the truth. Occasionally we need to say, "That sounds strange" or "That's hard to believe." Etc.
- Mercy listens tenderly, so that we can render aid, not to criticize.
- Patience listens quietly to the story of people just like us, and people utterly unlike us, old or young, rich or poor, simple or wise, smooth or broken, so we can tell them of Jesus.
- The goal: discuss real issues in real terms, so that people will say, "I'm glad we spoke."

Role Play: Each elder is either in the hospital, or an elder visiting someone in the hospital. There are five different scenarios outlined on the back which include: the disease, the diagnosis, the spiritual condition, maybe also the family condition. That gives the sick person a starting point. You can embellish a little but just for the sake of realism. Take 10-12 minutes. Then reflect on what happened.

Hospital Visit Role Play Scenarios 2024

Scenario 1

Gallbladder Removed – William had severe pain in his upper abdomen and did not know what was going on. He drove himself to the emergency room and after evaluation, the doctors determined he has gallstones and a blockage. They have admitted him to the hospital to have his gallbladder removed and for more investigation into his condition. He is waiting in the ER to be admitted and to hear the time of surgery. He is estranged from his family and is feeling alone and discouraged. He is a Church member, but a sporadic attender in Worship and not closely connected to a Sunday School. He is dealing with doubts about God's care for him and doubting his salvation. A friend called the Church and asked for someone to visit with William.

Scenario 2

Open Heart Surgery – John had chest pains a few days ago and went to his GP who sent him to the ER. They did a heart catheter and determined that he needed open heart surgery due to having five significant blockages in the arteries leading to his heart. He is in the hospital room and awaiting open heart surgery the next morning. He asked for prayer from his Sunday School Community. John is very anxious about the surgery. He and his wife asked that one of the elders stop by and pray with him. His wife and oldest daughter, who is not walking with the Lord, are both in the room with John when the elder comes by to pray with them.

Scenario 3

Automobile Accident – Jeremy was driving home from a 3-day work trip when he was involved in an automobile accident. He has a broken leg and fractured ribs. He is in the hospital and has received the needed medical care for his immediate injuries. He is in his mid-forties. He and his wife have 4 children who are at their home staying with her mother. Jeremy and his wife are in the hospital room. They are Christians and are active in their Sunday School Community. They asked for prayer for healing and wisdom for decisions.

Scenario 4

Stage 4 Pancreatic Cancer – Thomas had pain in his stomach, sides and back. He went to his GP who recommended him to be admitted to the hospital for a battery of tests. They finished the tests and the doctor told him that he has stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He and his wife are surprised and trying to sort everything out. They are Christians but have not been as regular at attending Church Worship Services for the last two years since they bought a lake house. They have spiritual questions. He is reluctant to open up and talk.

Scenario 5

Congestive Heart Failure and Apparent End of Life – Donald has been battling the different stages and difficulties of Congestive Heart failure for 5 years. He recently left the hospital to go to his home on hospice. They notified his family that he will probably be home with the Lord in the next couple of days. He has had the support of his close friends at Church, his faithful wife and his two children. He is a strong believer and active in our Church. He has one daughter who is a believer and a son who is not. He has been sharing the gospel with his son for years, but his son has not been open to listen until recently. When the elder comes to visit, the family is gathered around Donald. The wife had asked the elder to come by and asked him to read a Bible passage, pray with them and sing a hymn with them. They are at home with a health care provider in the room with them when the elder arrives.