

# **Visiting the Bereaved**

**Leaders' guide**

**Parish Education**

**Rutherford House**

# Preface

## The Aim

*The aim of the course is to help church leaders train people within the congregation so that they might be involved in caring for the bereaved.*

## The objectives of part 1

1] *to look at some of the general issues involved in visiting people in their homes but with special emphasis on visiting the bereaved.*

2] *to make people aware of the process of bereavement*

3] *to enable people to treat the bereaved sensitively*

4] *to give people courage (to at least come back to part 2!)*

## The material

A] *It is laid out so as to alternate some teaching with some discussion and reflection .*

B] *There are two books*

1) *a work book.*

*A copy of this will be given to all the participants at the start. This contains the teaching and some space for reflections*

2) *a leaders guide.*

*This contains everything in the work book plus extra material written in italics to help direct affairs and also to give some suggestions that might help during the feedback time.*

## Leading

### 1] Content.

*The teaching material is full but 'dry'. It needs the addition of the 'water' of the leaders and participants' own reflections, examples and experiences.*

### 2] The timing

*Part 1 may take about 4 hours to run through in total. People have been asked to come for 10.30. The day could either be organised to start with coffee and then take a break for lunch, or alternatively to start promptly and take a break mid morning for coffee and have lunch a little later with a resultant shorter afternoon session.*

*3] Discretion may be liberally employed in its delivery. Abbreviate, skip over or amend where appropriate!!*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

*Give out name badges and allow people to introduce themselves. If the group is large it may be best at this point to split them into the threes in which they will be working.*

Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children,  
and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us  
Ephesians 5: 1

We take as our theme for this training session on bereavement visitation the words of the apostle Paul, *Be imitators of God.* As we think about what we might do when we visit others, let us consider what God did when he 'visited' us and learn from it so that we might do like wise

## a) He offered friendship

Jesus said to his disciples that he called them friends not servants. When you are hard pressed and vulnerable you need friends. When visiting the bereaved we hope that in the midst of their pain they might see us as coming to them as a friend.

## b) He took the initiative.

God came to us and stood where we are. When we visit the bereaved we are coming to their home and so taking the first step. We want them to feel not that they are having to ask us to do things for them but that we are offering to help and serve them in this time of need.

## c) He gave himself

Jesus did not offer us a professional service, He gave us his life as a sacrifice for our sin and His Spirit as a constant companion when He left us. We are unable to give ourselves totally as Jesus did. However while recognizing our limitations, we need to convey to the bereaved that we have compassion for them and thus are personally involved with them in their grief.

## d) He was the Word of God

In Jesus, God revealed himself and spoke to the World. Jesus' followers have been given His Spirit. Through his followers therefore we might also expect that God might be revealed. William Still used to speak of Christians being 'little Jesus' in the world. As we visit we pray that the peace and presence of Jesus might be known by the household

## II. PREPARING FOR YOUR VISITS

When we are about to visit the house of someone who has been bereaved, we need to do some preparation before we ring the door bell.

- A. Discuss in groups what personal preparations you might make before visiting

### Personal Preparation

1. *Do some background work (perhaps telephoning a friend) on the home you are to visit and take some notes of special problems:*

*e.g., illness, unemployment, family connections, domestic problems, etc.*

2. *Choose the most appropriate time to visit that particular family. For example, if they have young children, then it may be better to go about 9pm when the children are in bed. If they are elderly, visit before 8pm.*

3. *Try to think in advance about what you will say, and the way you will try to guide the conversation – without, of course, being in any sense rigid or inflexible.*

4. *Pray very particularly about your visit.*

5. *Choose some suitable literature to take with you.*

B. I want us now in our groups to set down some **objectives** of each visit. What are we trying to achieve?

1. *To reach out with the love of God.*
2. *To demonstrate the concern & care of the Lord through his church.*
3. *To build up a relationship with this particular family.*
4. *To gather information about the deceased*
5. *To make preparations for the funeral service  
(These might not all be achieved at the same visit)*

C. Finally set down some **attitudes** we should have as we visit, which will govern our approach.

1. *Aware - Try and imagine what people will expect of us when we visit.*
2. *Attentive - Go prepared to listen, rather than to talk.*
3. *Flexible - be ready and willing for your immediate aims to be set on one side if other urgent matters are raised.*
4. *Focused - Keep your eye on the objective of the visit.*
5. *Humble - Go in a spirit of humility remembering that you are an ambassador – even the personal representative – of Jesus Christ himself.*

## 111 LEARNING TO LISTEN

Perhaps the single most important lesson about visiting is that we have to learn to *listen*. This is especially important when we are visiting those who have been bereaved. Listening is both an art and a discipline. When we say it is a 'discipline', we mean it is something that has to be learned. The word 'disciple' means 'scholar' or 'pupil'. And 'discipline' means 'learning' when given its most rudimentary meaning.

When we listen to people, they feel 'accepted'. They feel that they matter. They feel that we have a concern for, and interest in, them because we are listening to them. Note that by 'listening' we don't mean slipping into neutral and letting things glide along themselves, while we have a glazed look in our eyes, and our faces 'drop'. Not that at all. We are working, concentrating and giving them all our attention.

### Listening Practice

1] Arrange groups of three into Speaker 1, Listener1 and Reflector 1

2] Let the groups organize themselves in the following way

Ask speaker 1 to share in a couple of minutes an experience of bereavement that they feel comfortable in sharing

Ask listener 1 to listen carefully, and encourage the speaker to tell their story by asking questions as appropriate, summarising what has been said but not sharing their own experience.

Ask reflector 1 to observe the listener and at the end of the 3 minutes to ask the speaker

What did you find helpful in the way you were listened too?

Was there anything which the listener might have done differently?

3] Repeat the exercise twice more so that everyone can



adopt each role.

#### 4] Collate centrally what has been learned about good listening

*(Material below can be used to supplement anything that has been missed out)*

- *Poor listening is picked up by the person being visited and they register in their minds that we are not really interested. Poor listening is conveyed when we fidget, or drum our fingers, or look at our watch, or even wind it, or rattle keys in our pocket, or let our eyes wander.*

- *Good listening is conveyed by what we say and how we react. For example, by what we say: 'Yes, I see...' 'Is that so...' 'I'm sorry to hear that...' Or for example, by how we react: nodding our heads, our facial expression, our posture – sitting towards the person speaking, and slightly leaning towards them.*

- *Good listening also will give time to the other person to let them say what they have to say. The good listener becomes the passenger and lets the other person take the driving wheel. Note that the passenger can guide the direction the driver will take as well as the manner in which the driving is done!*

- *Good listening doesn't just 'sympathize'; good listening also 'empathizes'. What is the difference? A woman tells of a terrible row with her husband. If you sympathize, you say, 'I know how you are feeling. I had a row yesterday with my teenage son'. In other words, sympathy is feeling like the other person.*

*By contrast, if you empathize, you say, 'That must have hurt you a lot. I sense you're feeling distressed about it'. In other words, empathy is trying to see the experience through the other person's eyes, putting yourself into their shoes.*

- *Good listening doesn't mean you just sit and sit and sit. You must learn to listen, and then skillfully steer the conversation to a conclusion.*

- *Note the point at which we read and pray during our visit – not necessarily to conclude the visit and immediately before we intend to leave, but about two-thirds way through the visit, to open a 'door'.*

- *We must learn the body language of leaving. Move*

*forward in your chair, though still listening; then stand, though still listening!*

## Guarding the tongue

### 1] Silence is Golden!!!

When in doubt say nothing. In the numbness of grief, time seems to be suspended. Silences in conversation may be awkward to you but are not to the bereaved. Resist the temptation to fill gaps with prattle!

### 2] Using tongue wisely

Below is a list of things to say or not to say. Work through them in groups of 3 discussing what you think is the reasoning behind each

#### Don't Say

Maybe it's for the best

I know how you feel

You mustn't cry

You've got to be strong

Life must go on

It's God's will

#### Do Say

I'm sorry

Tell me how you feel

(Say nothing and let them cry)

You're entitled to grieve

You'll come through this – and I'd like to be there for you

It must be difficult to see

	meaning in this right now
They are in a better place	You really miss the him
Be strong for the children	Can I help with the children?
Be thankful you have another child	I can't imagine what it is like to lose a child
God never gives us more we can handle	I'm so sorry you have than had a loss
It's just going to take time	Let me help, no matter how long it takes.
You must keep busy	Let yourself grieve

*(Author unknown)*

### **Difficulties**

In threes discuss and write down below how you might deal with difficult situations where there was

- a) no apparent belief in God
- b) hostility
- c) criticism of yourself / the church

*(Collate the material and use 'the example of Jesus' given below to supplement the answers given)*

## The example of Jesus

a) Humility (I am meek and lowly in heart...)

*When we visit, we are not there to pass judgement, or to reach a verdict. God alone is the Judge, and in due time, he will come to a final, just and true judgement.*

*We are there in humility and meekness (note that meekness is not the same as weakness!) to offer understanding and to bring the message of the love of God in Christ.*

b) Acceptance (Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.)

*Pharisaism is the easiest snare in the world to fall into and many of us often have fallen into it in the past – a 'holier than thou' attitude. That was never true of the Lord Jesus. His relationship with people who were willing to have him was always one of acceptance: the woman of Samaria (John 4) and Zaccheus (Luke 19)*

*It is not going to be easy. We will find some people very unlovable. But then we were resentful of God and rebellious towards him when Christ loved us enough to die for us. We will get nowhere, do no good, and only turn people away if they do not sense that the love of God is reaching out to them through us. Hostility, hardness, condemnation in our hearts – all these will seep and leak out, unless they have been dealt with in prayer and got rid of.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me, as I seek the lost to win...*

*And may they forget the channel, seeing only Him.*

- *When you go to a door and are met with a host of complaints,*

- *when you sense you are not at all welcome,*

- *when open hostility against the church or minister is expressed*

*it is not easy to show acceptance. We really need to be empowered and motivated by the love of the Lord Jesus. Nothing else will do.*

c) Forgiveness (Your sins are forgiven you. Go in peace.)

*Seek to understand. When we understand the sense of rejection, or inadequacy, or loneliness, or hurt from some distant past experience, then it is a little easier to forgive. Telling people off never helps.*

*'I realise you must be feeling lonely', or,  
'You have been finding things a bit of a struggle', or ,  
'I realise you are feeling annoyed.'*

*Our great message is one of peace with God: reconciliation, forgiveness. This is why the Saviour came. We must live and breathe and be all that in our demeanor and person. This way are people won for Christ.*

## **Good speech!**

### 1] Prayer

If we are going to speak, then we can do nothing better for folk than to pray for them

If you find it difficult to pray in public, then have a prayer written out which you have prepared and keep it ready in the back of your Bible.

Always ask if they would like you to say a prayer and don't be offended if they say no! It may not always be appropriate to pray when visiting. However, leave them with the assurance that you will be remembering them in your prayers and then do it!

### 2] The Word

Be prepared to read from the Scriptures and to pray. Have several suitable passages marked in your Bible. For example, Psalms 23, 27, 34, 91, 121 etc., or Isaiah 40:1ff, 53, 55, or Matthew 5:1ff, 6:25ff, or John 1:1ff, 10:1ff, or Romans 5:1ff, 8:1ff, or 1 John 1:1ff etc. Know the content of several readings, and choose something appropriate to share with the family.

If you have a condolence card with some scripture on it, you might read it out and then leave it behind

We have already noted that it is often a good idea to plan to read and pray about half way through your visit. The reason for this is that occasionally reading from the Bible followed by a short prayer will open a door for serious conversation about spiritual matters. If, however, one reads, prays and then promptly leaves, the opportunity for those being visited to unburden their hearts is lost. So

be sensitive and alert to the desire the one you are visiting may have to speak with you after prayer.

Finally, saturate you visit in your own personal prayers. Pray before you go. Pray as you ring the bell. Pray always and in all circumstances.

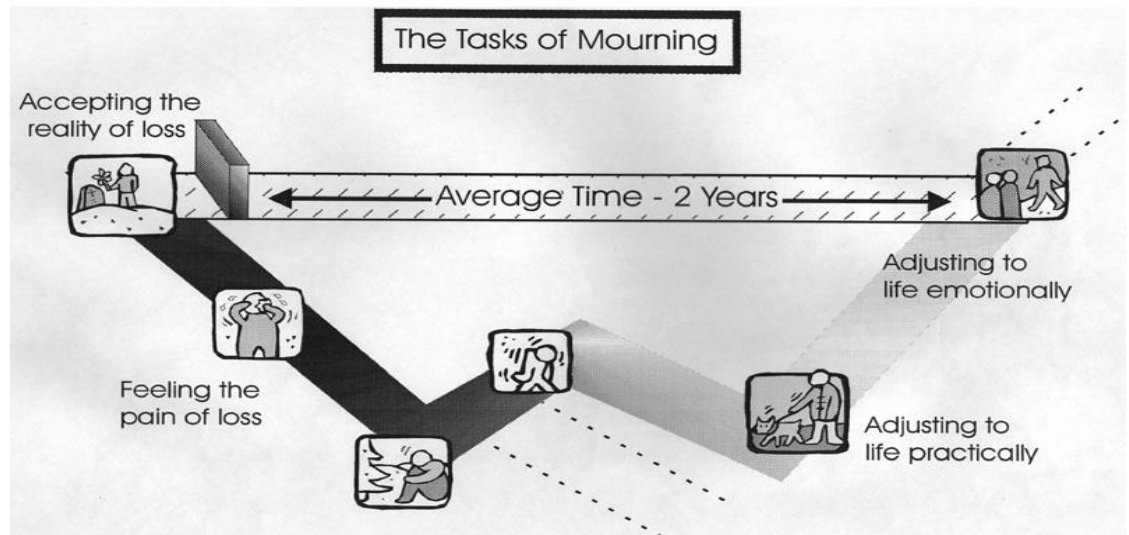
#### **1V. PITFALLS TO AVOID**

Discuss in groups for five minutes some pitfalls to avoid when visiting. These may be subjects that you might not talk about, or things that you might be tempted to do but which would not be appropriate or appreciated.

1. *Gossip.*
2. *Asking questions and not waiting for the reply.*
3. *Getting involved in arguments.*
4. *Unwholesome talk – eg, the world is getting worse and worse! What awful burglaries take place! What violence against senior citizens!*
5. *Speaking evil unwittingly (or knowingly!) of someone else,*
6. *Staying too long (and eating too much!)*
7. *Talking too much and being boring!*
8. *Being over jovial and saying little other than passing on your latest joke.*
9. *Being nose*
10. *Getting caught up in criticising.*  
*Say, 'I'd rather not talk about that, if you don't mind.'*
11. *Being lured into criticising other churches.*
12. *Getting involved in party political debate.*

## **SESSION 2**

## I. The process of bereavement



*J. William Worden: Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: Routledge: 1991*

There have been many studies done on bereavement. The example above is one by J William Worden. In his book, he describes coming to terms with bereavement as working through a series of tasks.

### 1] Accepting the reality of loss

Accepting the reality of the loss is described by William Worden in his book, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, as one of the tasks of mourning. He argues that it is not a stage or something that happens naturally as part of a process but a task that needs to be consciously addressed.

#### a) Normal Symptoms

##### 1) Shock

When someone dies, those who are bereaved usually experience a sense of **shock**, even if the death has been expected. Shock reactions vary. People might feel stunned, have a sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach. Tears and sobbing, hysteria, deep sighing, bodily and mental pain, shivering, tightness in the chest and throat are other ways



that shock might be experienced. The shock reaction is immediate and usually lasts, at most, for two days.

## 2) Numbness,

A feeling of being on automatic pilot, is a common experience once the shock reaction has worn off. A lack of concentration; feelings of nausea; lack of concern for self; inability to make decisions; a sense that this is all a bad dream, a feeling that this is not really happening are commonly experienced by those who have recently been bereaved. Some may appear, on the surface, to be in complete control of the situation but inwardly be experiencing a sense of isolation, pain and unreality.

### b] Unhealthy reaction -Denial

This task is about accepting the reality that the person is gone and will not return. Denial of this can take many forms. Sometimes people will refuse to admit that the person is dead, particularly if no body has been recovered. Sometimes people will keep a room the same as it was before the person's death, in case they return. Others might deny the meaning of the loss by ridding themselves of every reminder of the dead person. Others might resort to spiritualism to seek a reunion with the dead person.

### c] The Funeral

The funeral is an important part in completing this task as it marks the reality of the death and provides a public opportunity for those who mourn to begin saying goodbye to the deceased. It underlines the value of the life of the person who has died and their importance to others. Once the funeral is over and relatives and friends have gone home and gone back to work, the pain of the loss can be most acute. For this reason a week or so after the funeral may be a good time to revisit the bereaved. Talking about the person who has died and sharing memories can help the bereaved accept the reality of what has happened.

## **2] Feeling the Pain of the Loss**

Feeling the pain of the loss is another task which William Worden argues is necessary to complete in coming to

terms with loss. People might experience a number of feelings in their loss. The nature and intensity of these can depend on their relationship to and with the deceased, the manner of the death and their own personality.

### 1] Common feelings

a) Unhappiness - sadness, loneliness and depression.

b) Anger

1) at God for allowing the death; questions of "Why me?"; the injustice of a good life cut short or the painful death suffered.

2) at medical staff for seeming incompetence in allowing the death to happen, or at others around them. This may be expressed in disproportional reactions to mistakes of others people

3) at the person who has died, for abandoning them or contributing to their own death.

c) Guilt and self reproach may be experienced. What if I had got her to see the doctor sooner? Perhaps if I had tried harder our marriage would have been happier. I was driving the car but it is my passenger who is dead.

d) Anxiety about personal safety or one's ability to cope without the deceased might be an issue for some. Those who have lost a spouse sometimes develop similar symptoms. If a child has died, anxiety for the other children in the family can mount.

e) Yearning for the deceased might result in a feelings of aimlessness; idealising the person; restlessness to fill the void; frustration as nothing pleases; nightmares; seeing, hearing or feeling the presence of the dead person.

f) Relief or emancipation perhaps when death comes after a long illness or a bad relationship. Sometimes this combines with guilt because these feelings are seen as inappropriate in bereavement.

### 2] Unhealthy reaction - Suppression

To successfully complete this task, William Worden would suggest that feelings need to be faced, experienced and not buried under activity.

If emotion is not expressed at the time it may well store up problems for later. "Being brave" is not usually a beneficial way of dealing with a bereavement.

Expression and sharing emotions with someone trusted can help the completion of the task.

### 3] Acute incidents

Feelings can be particularly acute at the anniversary of the bereavement; at Christmas and New Year; at birthdays and anniversaries; the first time alone on holiday or in church. These are good times to find ways to remind the bereaved that they are loved and supported.

### 3] Adjusting to Life in Practical Ways

Adjusting to life in practical ways is the third task that William Worden describes.

This re-engagement with life may involve coming to terms with living alone; raising children alone; facing an empty house; going back to work; managing finances or learning new practical skills.

It can be encouraged gently and sensitively by surrounding loved ones. It is a process that takes time and 'forcing the pace' may be counter productive.

Unhelpful reactions

#### 1) Resistance

It takes an effort to do any of these and a person bereaved might struggle to adjust and prefer to be unnecessarily dependent on others.

#### 2) Precipitate change.

Sometimes decisions can be taken quickly to avoid the situation rather than deal with it. This might involve - moving house, changing job or remarrying can be taken quite soon after a bereavement. Two years is considered to be an average time to complete the tasks of mourning. Major decisions taken early on can often turn out to be unwise in the long term, as the person who has been bereaved is not thinking clearly in the early months.

### 4] Adjusting to Life Emotionally

William Worden's fourth task is adjusting to life

emotionally.

For many this can be the hardest task. It might involve coming to believe that life is worth living without the deceased; being able to treasure the memories without feeling the pain; being prepared to develop new relationships; being able to live with not knowing why the bereavement has happened; being able to take up new interests. Sensitive encouragement by others can be vital in working through this task.

Coming to terms with loss is about ups and downs as the diagram suggests. Tasks of mourning are not completed in a neat, logical order. Completing the tasks for some will be harder than for others. Completion takes time. Sadly for some they may never be complete. People who become stuck in their mourning can be helped by professionals. It is important to know what facilities are available in your area.

## **2 - Personal experience**

**In groups share any personal reflections and experience either of your own or that you have seen in others that have been stirred from your consideration of the above and note them below**

*(a short time after this for sharing the main points brought out in each group may be useful)*

## **3. Three further considerations about bereavement**

*(The following information is included in the work book and might be referred to briefly)*

**A] BEREAVEMENT MIRRORS THE RELATIONSHIP BEFORE BEREAVEMENT**

You look in a mirror and you see a reflection of your face. You may not like what you see, but you see a clear, faithful reflection of what is there! Bereavement is a kind of mirror. It reflects the relationship the bereaved person had with the deceased.

If that relationship was a deep, loving relationship with great commitment, then the grief is going to be very deep

and will reflect the depth of the commitment.

If the relationship was a very matter of fact relationship, not much romance, but steady, accepting, dependable—then expect the grief to reflect that matter of fact kind of bond.

If the relationship was actually a bad relationship, tempestuous with lots of rows and tensions, then expect a tempestuous grief, possibly with much guilt and resentment expressing itself.

It becomes apparent as one visits and seeks to console bereaved persons that just as any relationship will be governed by the temperament of those involved, so the bereavement pattern, as it mirrors that relationship, will also vary in accordance with temperament.

#### [ii] BEREAVEMENT WHICH EXPRESSES NO GRIEF (DENIAL) STORES UP FUTURE TROUBLE

A minister wrote “For ten years I was chaplain to a large psychiatric hospital. One phenomenon I met there was the person who had been protected from any grief at the time of bereavement. Let me give you an example of the type of problem to which I am referring. We’ll call the woman Jean. Her mother had died when she was in her late teens. She had had a very close relationship with her mother, and so the family had tried to guard her from what they imagined would be hysterical grief. So she didn’t attend the funeral. She never saw the coffin. No one ever spoke about her mother, but the rest of the family heaped her with gifts and holidays and tried to distract her. Indeed, they sent her away with a teenage friend to Majorca and the funeral took place in her absence.

Six years later, she had a total breakdown and had to be admitted into psychiatric hospital. She was in psychiatric care for many months. The denial had been so complete that the repressed grief had never been allowed to express itself in any way, and at last had caused a complete breakdown.

The widow or daughter or husband must be able to see the coffin. They must be able to watch it leave the house, and perhaps even see it lurch downwards into the grave.

I was at a funeral about five years ago. The widow whose husband was being buried was facing her loss with great courage. She insisted on being at the interment in the graveyard. I was concerned. Her courage was very commendable, but I knew something of the depth of love

and commitment in her relationship with her late husband.

As the coffin began to be lowered, I quickly and unobtrusively put myself in position directly behind her. I was right. She suddenly keeled over, and if I hadn't been there to catch her, she would have fallen into the grave. She had passed out completely. Her two sons, both grown men, were taken completely unawares. But she had done the right thing in attending the interment. She needed to see her husband's remains being lowered into the ground. In fact, that woman made a very good recovery from the bereavement, and though she still misses her husband very greatly, she has found a new identity and life."

### [III] THE GRIEVING OF BEREAVEMENT CAN TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE ACTUAL DEATH

Where someone is terminally ill and lingers for weeks, sometimes months, the process of grieving can be silently going on almost unnoticed. So that when the death at last occurs, the grief has already been expressed and the response to the bereavement is gratitude that at last the suffering is over.

Don't think harshly of the person whose grief comes before the actual separation. We don't have the choice between a swift call home—sitting down in an armchair after an afternoon on the bowling green and with one short gasp, passing from this scene of time; or being overtaken with cancer of the liver and lingering in bed at home for months, losing weight, and ultimately being taken into the local hospice. That choice isn't ours.

But the effect on the loved who is left to cope is equally traumatic. Suddenly losing a loved one without a moment's warning is an awful experience. On the other hand, losing a loved one by watching her slowly and painfully dying is also an awful experience.

In the one case, the grief rushes in and builds up like a great river that has been dammed, until the dam bursts in an awful torrent of emotion. In the other case, the grief has flowed silently and unnoticed for months and there is no bursting of the dam—those reserves of emotion have already been drained dry.

## 4 Practical Issues

In groups of three discuss how you might address the following

1. Suggest some of the ways in which people express a sense of guilt during the early stages of bereavement.

*E.g., If only I hadn't let him go to his allotment when it was raining so he caught that terrible cold.*

How would you deal with such expressions of guilt?

*Gently challenge irrational guilt*

*When appropriate, assure of forgiveness of God*

2. What should be our response to

- a. if the bereaved start weeping and displaying emotion

*Let them cry don't start prattling*

*Don't show embarrassment*

*If appropriate, remove the attention from them and speak to others present*

- b. If emotion veers off out of orbit into hysteria, as sometimes it does?

*NB Unusual – don't panic!*

*Gentle treatment – let them come round*

*Not alcohol but tea*

*Get doctor if persist*

3. How do we answer the 'Why?' questions during the resentment stage of bereavement? And how do we cope with anger.

*E.g., He was a good man who did no one any harm. Why has God taken him just as he was retiring and*

*had so much to look forward to?*

*Hang in there*

*Be willing to say I don't know*

*In response to anger, if possible, be passive*

4. What might we physically do to convey our empathy / sympathy as we visit the bereaved

*Appropriate physical contact*

*Quiet attentive listening*

5. What should be our reaction to the withdrawal stage of bereavement when our member refuses to face reality?

*Coax gently when appropriate, don't force the issue*

6. Are there any ways in which the church could help in the re-emergence stage which is characterized by the bereaved person taking on simple tasks?

*(Collate the answers to the above question and use the list below to supplement)*

*1. PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS OF EMPATHY / SYMPATHY*

*Sit reasonably close to the bereaved person. A chair on the other side of the room isn't a good start. I used to find that often there was no seat beside the grieving person as the room*



was filled with relatives and visitors, and so I would go and kneel on the floor beside them, close enough to be able to take their hand.

Don't be afraid of a physical expression of sympathy, either holding a hand or putting an arm around the shoulder. However, **a golden rule must be to avoid any physical contact if the bereaved person is alone in the house.** At this stage, there may not be any point in trying to talk or engage in conversation, only a simple expression of sorrow: 'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. He was a dear friend to me. I'm so sorry.'

If the person is sufficiently composed, encourage him or her to talk about the one who has died. 'Has he been ill for some time? Did he seem to be responding to treatment in hospital?' etc., questions which encourage the person to speak.

But also note that bereaved people can appreciate listening to others talking together and being allowed to be silent spectators who are not expected to take part in the conversation.

## *2. GRIEF MUST BE ALLOWED TO BE EXPRESSED*

I'm going to use an illustration which isn't particularly pleasant, but it's been of help to me in my own pastoral care. Grief is a little like the poison in the human system which causes a boil to form. The boil has to be lanced so that the grief can be squeezed out. To take the illustration a little further, if the grief is not expressed, then it can turn to a kind of 'septicemia' and end up poisoning the whole psychological system.

In working with bereaved persons, therefore, we have to be infinitely patient and allow the tears to flow and the hurt and anguish to come out. This is all part of the healing process and it mustn't be inhibited. It is rarely helpful to urge sorrowing people to 'hang in there' or to 'pull themselves together'. They must even be enabled to let the bereavement process take its natural course.

It's a great mistake when relatives try to silence the mourning person's expression of their grief. I have often had family saying to me, 'She won't keep quiet about the bairn [a cot death]. We've tried to shut her up, but she keeps on going back over the same old story. It can't be good for her.' I take them to one side and say, 'I know it may seem wearisome to you, but she must be encouraged to talk about her baby. She must go over it again and again.' And I use the illustration of the boil and explain that the grief must be allowed to be expressed. Usually, I have found the family appreciated the

*point and stopped trying to force the sorrowing person to repress their grief.*

### *3. LEARNING TO LISTEN*

*We have already thought a little today about the discipline of listening. Sufficient to repeat that listening is a discipline which demands hard work. However, in the home of a bereaved person, the emphasis is always on listening. That is not to say one says nothing. Part of listening is to make responses and even to ask questions to encourage the speaker to share more of what is on their hearts. However, the point is this: we must learn to give a listening ear so that the burden that is weighing so heavily may be shared. A burden shared is a burden halved – we should all know that.*

### *4. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS*

*Consider those 'Why?' questions! Why has this happened to me? Why was he taken when he had so much to live for? Why does God allow suffering in this world? How can there be a God when there is such suffering and grief?*

*We must work out for ourselves the answers to these everyday questions of life. At the end of the day, the answer our Bibles gives us come from the lips of Christ Himself. Sin has entered this world and in its train brought weakness and frailty. God created us free agents. It is because of human sin that mortality afflicts men and women. But Christ has come precisely because of that, to deal with the effects of sin so that he can bring us the assurance of life after death for those whose confidence is in him.*

*Remember that at the grave of Lazarus, Jesus himself wept. Scholars disagree as to exactly why he wept. But at least part of the answer must be that he was grieved at the ravages of death and the sorrow that it brought.*

## **5. Ongoing pastoral concern**

The Church needs to express the love of Christ in an

ongoing pastoral care of those bereaved. In the first few weeks, lots of friends will doubtless call. The Church must be there too. But then the visits begin to tail off. That is when we as church elders and visitors mustn't begin to tail off as well.

It can be an enormous help to leave some small item of literature, for example the leaflets produced by, e.g., the Bible Society. In some cases, a copy of C.S.Lewis' book, *A Grief Observed* could be a great help.(see below) When the house is empty, a few simple words of assurance from Christ, readily accessible, left on the mantelpiece, can be a means of comfort.

A card (or better) a visit on the anniversary of the death can be immensely appreciated.

Churches have different practices of collectively remembering the bereaved eg.

1) a small plant at Christmas to all who have been bereaved during the past year.

2) an annual special service of remembrance . This may be held at a time other than Sunday morning. All those bereaved in the last year are personally invited and the passing of the loved one is marked during the service by the reading of the roll of the deceased or some such way.

### **Readings from 'A Grief Observed' by C S Lewis**

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The

same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness ...I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hardly to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me ...

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be — so it feels — welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once ...

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of becoming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, "So there's no God after all", but, "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer."

I cannot talk to the children about her. The moment I try, there appears on their faces neither grief, nor love, nor fear, nor pity, but the most fatal of all non-conductors, embarrassment. They look as if I were committing an indecency. They are longing for me to stop.

## **A Booklist**

**Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: J William Worden: Routledge**

This is a standard text for those dealing with bereaved people. Although written mainly for health professionals, it is written in a plain and informative style with plenty of case studies.

**A Grief Observed:** *C S Lewis: Faber & Faber*

This is a personal record of the author's feelings on the death of his wife. It is written from a Christian perspective and honestly faces the issues of pain and suffering. It is useful for grieving people who have difficulty expressing and understanding their pain

**Bereavement- A Shared Experience:** *Helen Alexander: Lion:*

*www.lion-publishing.co.uk*

This book is suitable for those experiencing bereavement and those seeking to support them. It contains personal stories of a wide range of bereavements from a Christian perspective – very readable

**Understanding Bereavement:** *Mind Publications:*  
*www.mind.org.uk*

This helpful booklet, from the mental health charity, sets out clearly the experience of bereavement. It encourages those who have been bereaved to seek out help and commends them to spiritual resources as well.

**Letting Go:** *Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck:*  
*SPCK*

This book is written mainly for chaplains but is useful to a wider readership

**A Special Scar:** *Alison Wertheimer: Routledge*

This book deals with suicide and the effects it has on the survivors. There is a lot of case study material which explores the topic in a thoughtful, practical and compassionate way.

**Surviving the Death of a Child:** *John Munday:*  
*D.L.T.*

A teenager is murdered; the murderer is not found. This book describes how a Christian mother comes to terms with her personal tragedy.

**Living When A Loved One Has Died:** *Earl Grollman: Souvenir Press*

A thoughtful and encouraging book for the bereaved.

**Living Through Grief:** *Harold Bauman: Lion Booklet*

This booklet deals with the feelings experienced by many in bereavement, from a Christian standpoint

**All in the End is Harvest:** ed *Agnes Whittaker; DLT/Cruise*

This anthology of prose and poetry has provided comfort to many.

**Losing a Child:** *Elaine Storkey: Lion Booklet*

In this short booklet the effects of the loss of a child are sensitively explored from a Christian perspective.

**When Your Child Loses a Loved One:** *Theresa Huntly: Augsburg*

A booklet containing helpful guidance for parents.

**Children and Bereavement:** *Wendy Duffy: Church House Publishing: [www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)*

Useful reading for parents, teachers and others involved in helping a child or teenager come to terms with a death. Helpful appendices are included with readings and prayers, support organisations and books and resources.

**Water Bugs and Dragonflies;** *Doris Stickney: Mowbray*

This simple illustrated booklet explains death to children and gives guidance to parents as well as prayers for both children and parents.

## Prayer Cards

Credit card sized, laminated cards which can be personalised, from

Amos Scripture Care Trust

St George's West Church

58 Shandwick Place

Edinburgh

EH2 4RT

Tel. 0131 623 7141

[www.amos-sct.org.uk](http://www.amos-sct.org.uk)

## **Pastoral Cards with Prayers and Readings**

CPO  
Garcia Estate  
Canterbury Road  
Worthing  
West Sussex  
BN13 1BW  
Tel. 01903 266400 for samples  
[www.cpo-online.org](http://www.cpo-online.org)

### **Scripture Selections**

Scripture Gift Mission  
3 Eccleston Street  
London  
SW1W 9LZ  
Tel. 0207 730 2155  
[www.sgm.org](http://www.sgm.org)

Scottish Bible Society  
7 Hampton Terrace  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5XU  
Tel. 0131 337 9701  
[www.scottishbiblesociety.org](http://www.scottishbiblesociety.org)

### **Support Agencies**

Church of Scotland Board of Social Responsibility  
Specialist counselling throughout the country,  
contact  
Charis House  
47 Milton Road East  
Edinburgh

EH15 2SR

0131 657 2000

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk) (see listings under Divisional Structures)

Cruse Bereavement Care

Leaflets, booklets and specialist counselling

Cruse House

126 Sheen Road

Richmond

Surrey

TW9 1UR

Tel. 020 8940 4818

[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

SANDS

The Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society offers telephone support, information and has groups throughout the country.

28 Portland Place

London

W1N 4DE

020 7436 7940

[www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)

The Compassionate Friends

An organisation of bereaved parents and their families who offer understanding, support and encouragement to others after a child's death. Information and advice is also given to those who are helping the family.

53 North Road

Bristol

BS3 1EN

0117 966 5202

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)



The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths  
Offers a 24-hour helpline to anyone who has  
experienced the death of a baby.

020 7233 2090

[www.sids.org.uk/fsid](http://www.sids.org.uk/fsid)

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