



Member Care: Visitation

iFOLLOW

Working with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Member Care: Listening Skills

This presentation is designed for people who desire to serve Jesus Christ and help lead others to Him.

Learning Objectives

1. How to determine who needs to be visited and by whom
2. Learn to set up a visit and decide what to take with you
3. Understand how to conduct yourself while visiting, without raising barriers
4. Know when and how to move to spiritual topics in a visit

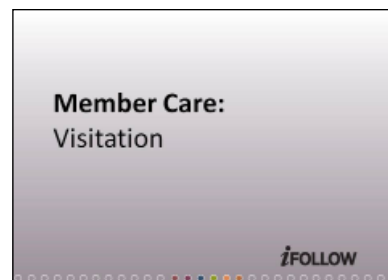
Content Outline

1. Overview of Member Care in the Bible
2. Whom to visit: Newcomers, The Ill or Bereaved, The Overwhelmed, Dropouts
3. Spiritual Families
4. Who should make the visit
5. Preparations
6. To gift or not to gift
7. Conversations: Getting acquainted and sharing information
8. Offering assistance
9. Grieving with others
10. Sharing Jesus

Background Material for the Presenter

An informal visit to someone's home, office or other appropriate place are probably the oldest and most universal of all social interactions. In our busy, contemporary world, however, it has lost most of its informality, at least in North America. There are social norms and protocols to follow. Now only family or a few very close friends can just "drop by." But it has not always been thus.

In Bible times even total strangers passing by were welcomed in, fed, entertained, and given lodging overnight or longer. Even God came down to visit Abraham, was fed and went walking and talking with him. (Genesis 18)



Angels visited Lot (Genesis 19:1-3); Abraham's servant visited Rebekah and her family (Genesis 24); Dinah went calling on the neighbor girls (Genesis 34:1). The list weaves down through the centuries. Samuel visited Jesse and David (1 Samuel 16); the queen of Sheba came to see Solomon.

In the New Testament, Gabriel visited first Zechariah, then Mary, who went to visit Elizabeth (Luke 1, 2). Jesus visited with a number of people: Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 11), Matthew (Mark 2:15-16), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5-7), Peter's home (Mark 1:30), and a great many others, from Pharisees (Luke 7:36) to the "untouchables" (Mark 2:16). And let us not forget it was a two-way street. People visited Jesus, too. (John 3) Most importantly, God came to visit His people. (Luke 1:68)

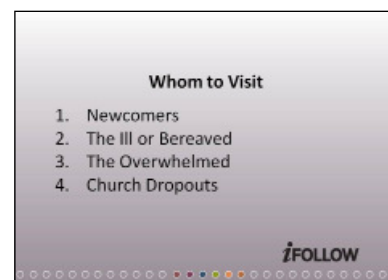
Actually, the New Testament has a lot to say about visiting, and Paul lists hospitality as one of the gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12) and a prerequisite for church leaders. (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8)

Perhaps the most striking comment on visiting to be found in the whole Bible is in Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. We know, of course, that we are saved by the pure gift of God's grace, not by works, but because He has saved us, we will perform good works, which He prepares us for (2 Timothy 2:21). So the "sheep" are commended for good deeds, and listed among them (v 36) is visiting those who are sick or in prison. Also note that, in verses 41-43, Jesus points out failure to visit as one of the faults of the "goats." James echoes this by writing that pure and undefiled religion includes visiting orphans and widow in their distress. (James 1:27) So obviously "visiting" is on the job description of loving, saved Christians.

Whom to Visit

We have seen that the poor ("orphans and widows"), the sick and prisoners should be visited, but they are not the only ones. (These days prison ministries are closely regulated and monitored—the requirements varying from state to state—so they will not be discussed here. If you wish to become involved in this, ask your local pastor how to go about this.)

A tradition among Adventist pastors, when first assigned to an area, is to visit every home during the first year. One church with over 400 members on the books and an average attendance of 250 planned a visiting campaign. A letter was sent out to everyone on the membership list announcing that during the following quarter, every home would be visited, unless a letter or phone call was received from the member requesting not to get a visit. The letter also asked any members will-



ing to help with the visiting to contact the pastor or the church secretary. Everyone had a great time and the average attendance rose to well over 300 every week.

1. Newcomers—Every visitor to the church should be warmly welcomed, preferably by several people—not just those stationed at the door with bulletins—and encouraged to sign a guest book or otherwise give their name and contact information. Someone should follow up within the following week with at least a phone call, and arrange a visit if possible. Adventists moving in from another area should be visited, as well as local people who are not members of the Adventist Church. Many times baptized members are lost when they move to a new area. Research has shown that churches where newcomers in worship are promptly contacted outside of Sabbath activities have a much greater growth rate than churches who do not make these contacts.

Newcomer ministry can be expanded beyond those who actually come to church. Some churches purchase the names of all new residents for their community on a monthly basis and send a letter offering a gift. Those who phone to accept the gift are then visited by church members. Ideally, all church members should be acquainted with their neighbors, and make a special point of welcoming new neighbors. It does not matter whether the neighbors are “churched” or not, they are all eligible to become friends.

2. The Ill or Bereaved—If a church member is ill or experienced a death in their family, then it is important for the pastor or an elder to make contact as quickly as possible and go to the home or hospital as soon as it is appropriate. If you learn that a friend of yours at church is seriously ill, you may wish to take action. If the individual is merely an acquaintance, it may be best to ask the pastor (or an elder or the visitation team leader) before going. Many sick people are not up to multiple visitors and some are even too sick for phone calls. In such cases it is best to put off visits until the time is right. Whoever makes the first contact should speak to a family member first, find out if the person is able to receive visitors, and let others know. If the patient is in the hospital, you need to speak to the unit nurse as well. If someone in your neighborhood is ill, the same courtesies apply; phone first and speak to a family member.

People who have suffered a great loss need all the comfort they can get; so don't deprive them of yours. They may even benefit from practical assistance. The loss can range from a job, the family home (through fire, flood, foreclosure, etc.) or divorce; amputation of a limb, loss of vision or hearing, all the way to death of a family member. It is a documented fact that any of these losses can cause at least some depression and any one of them is likely to precipitate a grieving process. Naturally, not all losses are equal, and the depth and length of grief will vary accordingly, as well as according to the personalities involved.

3. The Overwhelmed—Sometimes life just seems to pile on too much at once. You know the feeling. You're still trying to get settled in a new home and the kids all break out with chicken pox. You're working overtime most nights on that big rush order at work and the car breaks down. Even joyous events, such as a big promotion or the birth of a new baby

are very stressful. The frail elderly who still live at home fall into this category, as well, even if they are not ill or home-bound. A visit from someone willing to pitch in and help can be a great gift.

4. Church Dropouts—The church exists for five main reasons: to worship and glorify God; to spread the true gospel to everyone (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8); to do the work of Jesus in the world among the poor and suffering (Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 4:18-19); to establish and strengthen us in the faith and grow us up to the full stature of Christ (1 Peter 5:10, Ephesians 4:11-16); and to be our spiritual family (Mark 3:35).

There are many reasons why people, suddenly or gradually, stop attending church, but the vast majority slip away because they perceive that their spiritual family failed them in some way. Even if this perception is true, it was probably not specifically intentional and is often not even realized by others. It is simply a blind spot for many congregations. The family is made up of humans, after all, and if we aren't praying daily for the Holy Spirit to fuse us into one body firmly attached to Jesus (Col. 2:19) we run the very real risk of becoming a dysfunctional family.

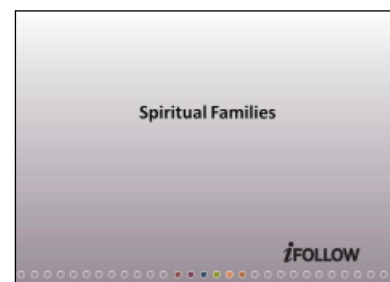
One reason for this is that we tend to delegate member care entirely to the pastor, despite the fact that we do not have enough trained pastors to assign one for every 100 members. Many members think it's the pastor's job to build up the church and nurture members, forgetting that we are all called to be ministers of the Gospel, commissioned to go and make disciples. (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 3:6)

Spiritual Families

Churches near our schools, hospitals and other institutions often grow very large, and if you don't know every face and name, it isn't a very close family. In America small churches share a pastor with as many as four or five other little churches, and often don't see their pastor more than about once a month. In other countries, ordained ministers are frequently called on to oversee dozens or scores of small congregations, all led by lay pastors. It is therefore necessary for church members to learn how to love, nurture and care for their Christian brothers and sisters.

Large churches need to encourage each and every member to join a small group, an intimate spiritual family within the larger clan, so to speak. Some churches are already doing this, but the practice needs to spread much more widely.

These smaller groups are variously called cell groups, prayer groups, Bible study groups, interest groups (where the members share an interest such as hiking, scrapbooking, etc.), support groups (with a focus on a particular need such as weight loss or addictions), and



mission groups (where they focus on outreach). All groups are to meet regularly (usually weekly, but sometimes only monthly) outside of church, as well as chatting in the halls or parking lot before, between, or after services. In some cases the groups also serve as Sabbath School classes, especially in Spanish-language congregations. (In fact, Sabbath School classes can be taught to become their own spiritual family.) This goes a long way toward solving the typical mega-church problem of no one knowing who's missing any given week. If you don't show, your "family" will notice. Someone will be designated to call you and let the others know if you are sick or heavy laden, and whether you would like a visit, or need a little help.

Who Should Visit

Now we come to some of those "social norms and protocols." They differ from place to place and among cultures, but here are some general guidelines.

A single man is usually not the best person to visit a single woman (or vice-versa) unless there is an age difference of about three decades. Even married people who are alone in the house may be uneasy admitting a member of the opposite sex. We have been cautioned to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22) and some take this very seriously. Two women or a married couple make a good visiting team, but if this is not possible and you think someone needing a visit will hesitate to accept a lone visitor of the opposite sex, suggest meeting in a public place such as a cafe, park, public library, or maybe their place of work. (There is a temptation to solve this problem and the problems associated with distance and geography by suggesting a meeting at the church building. This is not a good idea. It defeats the entire purpose of visitation, which is to go see people on their own turf. A invitation to meet at the church may even seem to the other person as a summons for some kind of official inquiry or reprimand.)



Enthusiastic young people, alone or in teams, make great visitors to people who need practical help (shopping, chores, yard work, etc.), or those who need a reason to come back to church. But they might prove too much for someone who is very ill or quite shy.

Brash, forward people often have hearts of gold, as the saying goes, but if they want to make visits, steer them toward strong personalities.

It is not a good idea for more than two or three people to visit the ill, but sometimes a work party (to clean the house and yard, make repairs or paint) might contain up to eight people, depending on the tasks to be done and the tolerance of the elderly or disabled person you are doing them for.

Once you get to know the people in your church or small group, you'll know better who

to send to whom. Of course, we should be praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every case.

Preparations

Prayer is the most essential preparation of all. Your whole visiting team (if you have one) or spiritual family should be together in prayer as soon as the need for a visit is identified. Ask God whom to send, how to make the approach, and to send His Spirit to go with the visitor(s) and preside over the conversation. Pray while you are on your way to the visit. After the visit, thank Him for successes. If it doesn't go so well, ask how to make it better next time.

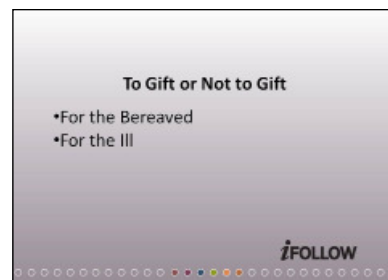
If you do not personally know the individual or family to be visited, ask if a member of the family is willing to accompany you. If the local family is estranged, learn what you can from family or friends. Listen, without judgment, to what you are told, but keep an open mind; there are at least two sides to every story.

If at all possible, you should call before you make the visit. It will give the person a chance to say when is a good time, perhaps saving you a needless trip. You should first consult your own calendar to see which dates and times are not already committed, so that you can offer several possibilities for the person to choose from. In many cultures (even within North America) it is not necessary to call before visiting the bereaved, you are expected to just show up and the sooner, the better. When in doubt, however, do call.



To Gift or Not To Gift

When is it appropriate to bring a gift to give the person you visit? If you are visiting a new neighbor, by all means, a loaf of homemade bread or a jar of homemade jam is appropriate; or a casserole if it looks like they won't get the truck unloaded in time to cook. A map of the local area showing the closest grocery store, laundry, post office, library, park, etc. makes a great gift. These days most phone books contain free maps and you can use a bright marker to point out the various places. Or print one from one of the computer mapping services and personalize it with the marker. A bouquet of bright fall leaves or flowers fresh from your garden is a cheery welcome, too.



For the Bereaved—People are usually expected to bring food and/or flowers or plants to a household struck by tragedy. If you think they will get more of these than they can use,

a lovely picture or a book might be appreciated. The picture could be of Jesus and/or heaven (if the family are believers) or a peaceful landscape. A Christian bookstore employee can help you select a nice little gift book. There are many on the market for those who have lost a spouse, parent, child, best friend, etc.

For the ill—Before you take a gift to a sick person, be sure it is something they are allowed to have and will enjoy. Some medical conditions require certain restrictions. If they are at home, ask the family member or caregiver who is aware of doctor's orders and perhaps the patient's likes and dislikes as well.

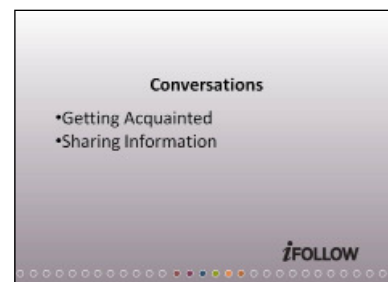
For those who are in hospital or a nursing home, you will need to talk to the unit or floor nurse. You can call and ask these questions before you visit. If the person asks you to bring something, be sure first that you are not countermanding doctor's orders.

Most nursing homes and some hospitals will allow a few holiday decorations. If the family is not near or doesn't wish to do this, but the person would appreciate it, you might like to do so. Just be faithful about taking them away when the big day is over. There is little storage space in the typical area for each person.

Home visits for other reasons do not require gifts, but do not prohibit them either. A few simple garden flowers, a plate of homemade cookies or fudge (if you know for certain that they don't break someone's diet) or a piece of fresh fruit will brighten up the day. An appropriate book can also be helpful.

Conversations

Getting Acquainted: Most of us probably know how to get acquainted and get comfortable with new people, but sometimes we still feel shy about it. It's not that hard. You share a little of yourself and ask a few gentle questions. You sound interested, not nosy. You smile and let the other person lead the conversation awhile. You practice good listening skills. You let them tell their story and move the conversation in a direction that they wish. You remember that God only has this one of this child, and Jesus died for him or her.



Sharing Information: This should sound like gentle helpfulness, not like you're handing down "the law of the Medes and Persians." Questions work very well here, too. To the new neighbor: "Did the realtor tell you which day the garbage truck comes?" To the new family at church: "Shall I show you where the children's classes are?" All accompanied by your brightest smile.

Practical Assistance

When visiting the chronically ill, the frail elderly and the overburdened, ask if they need errands run, laundry done, or help with anything else, but keep your eyes open, too, lest they say, “No, I’ll get to it, thank you” in a room (or house!) that doesn’t look as if it’s been “gotten to” any time recently. All these people need frequent short visits and occasional longer ones, but several well-briefed volunteers can get involved so that no one person is over-extended.

Don’t just think of necessary chores, little extras will be doubly appreciated. Offer to give a manicure, take dictation for a letter to a far away loved one, even wash and set someone’s hair.

Work Parties: When scheduling a work party, be sure to defuse any feelings of obligation or reciprocity on the part of the recipient by cheerfully insisting “we really would enjoy doing this if you will be so good as to allow us” or “these kids need something to do with their energy, and it will be a good opportunity for them to learn the joy of service” or “Well, you’d do the same for us if the situation were reversed, wouldn’t you?” With an elderly person, it often works to remind them, “I’m sure you’ve done your share for others over the years, it’s time for you to reap some benefits.”

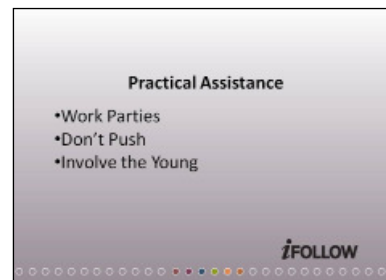
Don’t Push: Be ready to quickly back off if the person obviously does not want you there. If the work really needs to be done for the health and/or safety of the individual who cannot do it for him/herself, you may have to call on family members or perhaps social service professionals, to help persuade your friend.

With younger people who have gotten behind because of a new baby or an illness, it will probably be easier to offer a little help; but if you think someone is more likely to respond, “Thanks, that’s so nice of you, but I can manage,” fall back on the “you’d-be-doing-us-a-favor” tactic.

Involve the Young: The Pathfinder Club, church school students, and even students at some public schools are required to put in a certain number of community service hours, either for an honor patch, a grade, or extra credit. If you have youngsters in your church doing this, by all means use them. The overburdened new mother, the recovering-but-still-weak, even the frail, elderly will all be glad to know they are giving as well as receiving.

New Neighbors

In the case of new neighbors, skip the phone call. You don’t know the number anyway. It is best to approach them outside, during a lull in the activity. If such a moment doesn’t



present itself, knock; but in either case, don't stay more than a few minutes unless they urge you to stay or accept your offer to assist with the unloading. It only takes a minute to welcome someone, point out your house, and ask if two more hands would be helpful or get in the way. Point out your house, and add, "If you need help or information, just ask."

Become Friends First: Don't mention church or religion the first few visits, unless they do. You do not want to give the impression that your only interest in them is as prospective members for your church. Do keep them and your budding relationship in your prayers. In a few weeks, you might ask if they have found a church home yet. The response should tell you whether to drop the subject or extend an invitation.

When you have become friends, you may invite them, along with other non-Adventist friends, to join you for a special event: a concert, travelogue, children's program, church picnic, or health seminar. Do this in a casual, friendly way. "No" is an acceptable answer. Here, again, questions sometime work well, as in "Do you enjoy ...?" Or, "Would you like ...?"

Be careful not to speak "Adventist alphabet soup" to friends or neighbors who are not familiar with it. You may get away with inviting their children to VBS because other churches use that abbreviation, too. But expect blank stares (and lack of interest), if you tell someone your teenager's class at PAA is going on a YMA trip with TQH, or that a group from VOP is coming to hold meetings in your town and the GC president will speak at the opening meeting. (That's Portland Adventist Academy, Youth Mission Adventure, The Quiet Hour, Voice of Prophecy and General Conference, in that order.) But it is a lot clearer and simpler to new ears if you simply said, "My 16-year-old is spending a week in Mexico with a community service project."

When you feel prompted by the Spirit to invite them to a regular church service or a evangelism event, they will be more inclined to accept if they have already met other members in these casual ways. Friendship is the foundation for sharing faith.

Visits of Compassion

Hospital Visits: When making a hospital visit, it is a good idea to call the unit ahead and ask when is the best time. You don't want to arrive just as the patient is being wheeled away to X-ray or the lab. People ill enough to be in the hospital often cannot tolerate long visits or several visitors at once. But try to allow at least 30 to 45 minutes in case you are urged to stay or the talk turns to important concerns or fears about the future. You want to give each precious person your full, undivided, unhurried attention. This conveys to him or her that he or she is valued. If you are rushed, you may miss an



opportunity to be a real blessing. Sick children like to have visitors, too. Find out if the pediatric unit has special rules.

Nursing Home Visits: To visit a person in a nursing home, first talk to family and the charge nurse. Try not to interfere with the schedule of therapies or activities. If you wish to take a Sunshine Band to sing and/or visit all the residents, be sure to call at least three or four weeks ahead, to ensure you have a spot on the schedule. Ask for the Activity Director or Program Coordinator. Most facility calendars are made in the middle of the preceding month, and fill up rapidly in holiday months.

The Bereaved: Think about losing someone close to you and what you would want someone to say to you. Allow the mourner to be as dramatic as they desire, or as quiet. Different people and cultures mourn in different ways. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Avoid saying things such as, “It’s not that bad.” Or, “It could be worse.” Or, “It was meant to be.” Or, “Time will heal ...” All of these comments are likely to increase rather than decrease the mourner’s pain and the feeling that “no one understands.”

Church Visitors

It is nice if all visitors—especially first-timers—are invited to lunch, a potluck or fellowship dinner, if there’s going to be one, or a personal invitation from a church family. Some large churches assign adult Sabbath school classes, in rotation, to provide a get-acquainted dinner just for visitor on the Sabbaths in between potlucks. But make the invitation to lunch casual with no pressure. People with an Adventist background (or perhaps from other conservative Protestant churches) may respond immediately to a lunch invitation, but for others this may be a new and perhaps even overly intrusive idea. They may have plans to go do something immediately after your worship service or to meet friends somewhere. Many pastors and lay leaders tell me that newcomers in worship who do not have an Adventist background are much more likely to accept a lunch invitation the second or third time they come to church. Be ready to quickly back off if they seem nonplussed and say, “Maybe next time.”

If the newcomer does not stay for lunch, it is especially important that they get a phone call or email message from the pastor or a church member during the next few days. Again, in most places in North America, this should not include any overture to set up a visit until they have been at church two or three times.

When calling visitors, thank them for attending, and ask if they enjoyed the experience. Offer to share additional information about your church’s usual services or special upcoming events. It’s OK if the answer is “no” and don’t push, but do say you hope they



will come again. Ask if they have their own transportation or if they would like for you (or someone who lives closer to them) “to come by and pick you up, if that’s easier.”

Visiting the Visitors: If you are trying to set up a visit after they know you better (after the second or third time they are in church), first check your own schedule to see where you have a time available. This way, if you get a positive response you will have a few dates and times to suggest. Sometimes it works better to first invite the visitors to your home for a meal, or an afternoon walk, where the talk can flow naturally, instead of asking to go to their home. In more urban areas, it is probably best to suggest a neutral site such as a restaurant or coffee place.

Missing Members

If a person or family is usually at church, you should both be comfortable with a friendly phone call, text message or Email note; “Hi! Missed you at church this morning. Is everything okay?” Ask if they’d like you to bring a bulletin, or at least apprise them of the announcements. Depending on the answer you get, a visit may not even be needed, just your friendly call to let them know their church family cares.



If members are missing three Sabbaths in a row, and you find it difficult to get through by phone or Email, ask someone who may know if they are away or vacation or business travel, or if someone in the family has an illness. If you are told it is an illness or a vehicle problem, ask them if you can help in some way. When you contact them, mention that you hope to see them at church soon. Be friendly and sincere.

Meeting outside of church: If the answer is evasive, or they don’t return to church in another week or two, there might be a deeper problem. If you have been good friends, you might get away with a jocular, “Hey, are you guys snowed in out there?” or “Is there a bridge down between here and there that I didn’t hear about?” Be sure to say something like, “We’ve been missing you; how would you like to join us for a picnic today?” Or, “There is a hike this afternoon.” Or, “How about marshmallows and hot chocolate around the fireplace tonight?” Anything that sounds like a fun, non-threatening social occasion. Of course, you are hoping and praying that before the day (or evening) is over, you will be able to find out what has kept them away. Some intervention on their behalf may be called for. The particular skills involved with Reconnecting Ministry are discussed in another unit. Those skills may be needed at this point in the conversation.

Meeting resistance: If they tell you they don’t want to discuss it, do all you can to keep the friendship healthy, and the lines of communication open; just leave church and religion out of it for awhile. Your spiritual family and/or Sabbath school class can keep this family in prayer, and treat them as friends if they see them at the shopping mall or else-

where. If there are other close friends in the group, they can call and perhaps set up their own social occasions. Just caution them not to broach the subject of church unless they listen carefully and then feel Spirit-led. Pressure is more likely to push them farther away than to draw them back. Listening brings healing.

If something special is coming up at church, you might prayerfully mention it, or even say that you and your family are looking forward to it and you think they might enjoy it. Be prepared to change the subject immediately if a negative sound, gesture or facial expression interrupts you.

Grieving Together

We are all one body, and as the Bill Gaither song says, “When one has a heartache, we all shed a tear.” So why is it that we have such a hard time facing, and being around, someone who has just suffered a great loss?

Unless we’ve dealt with a great loss ourselves in a healthy way, we feel so awkward. We don’t know what to say, but we feel compelled to say something, so we echo platitudes, knowing even as we do, that they will never convey our feelings. So we drop our little gifts and leave as soon as we can politely do so. Even those who have been torn asunder by their own loss often don’t know how to speak to someone else’s pain. We are all so individual.

Wordless Sympathy: So who says you have to say anything? Job’s friends said nothing to him when they first came to visit (Job 2:11-13), but merely sat down with him in torn robes, ashes, and tears for seven days! In that era and area of the world, this told Job at a glance they felt his pain. Yes, the visit became a confrontation, but it was anchored in love and shared pain that enabled them to each speak his mind freely before the others, even though “each was partly right, and all were partly in the wrong.”

A healthy young man in his late 20’s suffered a series of losses over a period of two years, beginning with vague symptoms and later a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS). His father had a heart attack and died. His girlfriend decided she couldn’t handle his disease, knowing it meant increasing disability, and broke up with him. His widowed mother, burdened with her own loss, found it increasingly difficult to offer him the physical and moral support he needed. No longer able to perform as he had, he lost his job. Depression set in. Unable to pay the mortgage, he lost his home. Encouraged by his mother and his doctor, he made the difficult decision to move into a nursing facility. His MS progressed more rapidly than most cases do and he was soon using a wheelchair, needing help with his showers. His mother was suddenly snatched away by an auto accident. All this in 26 months! One day he asked the social worker “Do you know what hell is?”

“I know a few definitions. What’s yours?”



“Hell is to be young and be dying, and not even being able to live while you’re waiting to die.”

What can you possibly say to that? She didn’t try. She simply knelt on the floor by his wheelchair, wrapped her arms around him and they wept together. The pain of it all remained. The depression was a long time lifting even a little, but the tide had turned.

Remember the old saying, “Laughter shared is doubled; sorrow shared is halved.” There is something about knowing that someone cares enough about you to be rendered wordless and in tears over your pain. Many times it is the seed from which healing begins its slow but sure growth.

Touch: Touch is like fire. It can be warm and comforting. It can help prepare nourishment for the body or the soul. It can also damage and/or destroy. Jesus touched children and they were blessed. He touched the sick and they were well. He touched the “untouchables” and they rejoiced in acceptance. Can you touch as freely as He did? Only if you can stay in the Spirit as He did, and remember a few simple rules:



1. Know any ethnic or cultural rules or taboos the person you wish to touch may have.
2. Unless you are closely related or longtime good friends, don’t touch in private. You can’t be accused of wrong motives or behavior if you have witnesses.
3. Never touch anyone inappropriately. (If you are unsure what that means, ask your pastor.)
4. If you have the least doubt about the reception of your contemplated move, don’t do it. Or at least ask first, “Would you like a hug?”

When dealing with children and youth, the “rules” are even more strict. It is best not to touch them at all, unless you are in the clear view of other adults at church, the local church school or visiting a child in the hospital. Make your hug, back-pat or hand on shoulder (or head if child is young) brief and in full view of others.

Moving On: We have already learned that some losses are bigger than others, but even some small ones need to be mourned before they can be vanquished and “life goes on.” Do commiserate with the disappointments of your friends, even if it’s “only” the loss of a car or a friend who moved away, etc. But don’t dwell on it. After a week or three of, “I’m so sorry you had to ...” Or, “What a bum deal.” Or, “You must feel so disappointed.” Or, “After you put so much time and effort into it.” Or, “you’re really going to miss him/her,” move on. Offer to drive the “motorless” one around the used car lots.



Someone's home or career loss may take eight to 12 weeks of mourning (if the residence or tenure has been long), but the time will come to remind him or her that God has something better already planned. Keep your ears alert for potential job openings for the unemployed person.

If someone seems to be holding on to grief after you think it's become "too long," there are two things to remember. (1) We are all different, and God likes us that way. (2) If deep grief continues to well up from a lesser wound, there was another, deeper wound under there. You may be able to gently encourage them to open up to you or another close friend, or you may need to encourage them to find more skilled help from a pastor or counselor.

If you're visiting the hospital where someone has just lost a limb, or has been told she or he will need to make radical life changes or face an early death, don't say, "You're lucky to be alive!" Or, worse yet, "You should be glad" Show your compassion. You cannot imagine what they are going through unless you are limbless or terminal yourself. "Wow! This is so heavy." Or, "I'd be so mind-boggled by this!" Or, "I have no idea how you must be feeling right now, but it must be terrible." Whatever you say, be sincere. Phonies are easy to spot and never help anyone feel better. And this is no time to say, "It could be worse, you know."

Whatever else you say, do not tell the parents who have just lost an unborn (or hours old) baby, "Oh well, you can have another one next year." Never say, "It was God's will." Even if you believe our God of love ever wills pain for His children, don't spread that belief. God lives with a sinful world in which there is much grief and pain, but He does not cause it. In fact, He resists it to the extent that He can without taking away the fundamental free will He has given each human being. Those who have suffered through trauma and loss can come to an understanding and acceptance of that without well-meaning shoves.

Don't be afraid of a little humor while people are learning a whole new way of being and doing, but do not try to manufacture it, either. Sometimes laughter and tears are very close together, and one can turn into the other quite unexpectedly. That's OK; both serve as a release of tension.

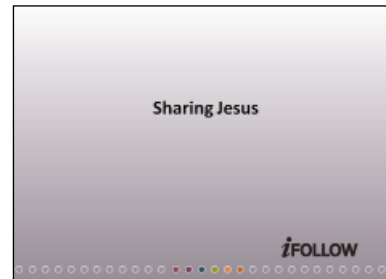
A time of loss is a time of jumbled emotions and confusions. It's easy to think "What next?" and not find an answer. It's too easy to do nothing, and even if you can summon up the energy to try, it can feel like slow motion. Negativity and hopelessness are just beneath the surface. Whatever your friend is feeling, is valid. Even if you don't believe you would feel or act the same way in the same circumstances, this is how your friend feels and reacts, and it is valid, as long as it is nondestructive to self or others.

Knowing just when to switch from sympathy to encouragement isn't always easy. Enabling the process to drag is a real pitfall. Pray for guidance as earnestly as you pray for your friend's comfort and healing. Gentle nudging to move on may eventually become necessary, but only God can know how long mourning takes for each individual. For now, just know that there will be various emotional, mental, physical and behavioral manifesta-

tions of grief, and as long as they don't pose a threat to the life, health and safety of the mourner, they are normal and should pass without serious consequences. The threats that need to be monitored are refusal to eat or take medications, talk of suicide, wandering about outside in traffic or at night "looking for the lost one" to come to them.

Sharing Jesus

Sometimes the hardest decision is knowing when and how to share one's faith or to talk to someone who has been away from church, voluntarily, for many months or years. You love this person as someone for whom Christ died, and you want him or her in the right relationship with Him, but



You will, of course, be praying earnestly for this person the whole time you have been getting acquainted or reconnecting with him or her. You don't want to appear too eager, lest the suspicion arise that this was your only aim all along. Nor do you wish to miss a golden opportunity that may not come again. Keep listening and praying. Wait for the Spirit to nudge you. The best clues usually come from the one you are visiting.

After you have been friends for awhile, any crises in your own life will give you the chance to show your gratitude for their compassion. You may at some point say, "I'm just so glad I have the Savior to walk this valley with me! Or, "I don't know how I'd get through this without God." This is another one of those situations where the response (or lack of one) is your best clue as to whether to continue or drop the subject.

If you are someone who just automatically brings your faith and its benefits into everyday conversation, then your friends will be used to this and their crises also become your opportunities. Start with, "Would it make you uncomfortable if I prayed for you about this?"

You can test the waters to see if they are ready to discuss the spiritual dimension of their situation by simply asking, "Do you have any spiritual resources to help you with this?" Resist the urge to add even one more sentence. Just let the question hang out there and keep your silence until they speak. Depending on how far away from God they may feel or how hurt by the church, the person may be silent for what seems like a long time before they respond. Even after a one-word response—"Yes." Or, "No."—if you keep silent, it may take them a little longer to say more.

Wait until they clearly state their feelings or show some clear sign that they would like to hear you offer them spiritual tools before you share your own similar experience, or suggest Bible promises or key texts, or offer a book, or ask if they would like to talk with the pastor or see a Christian counselor. Do not presume they are ready to receive religious help until they clearly tell you they are. Otherwise, you may do more damage than good.

With those who used to be church members or attended church school or are otherwise already acquainted with Adventist doctrines and Christian lifestyles, perhaps the best course is a simple question, “I’ve been wondering why you quit attending church. Would you care to talk about it?” If the answer is, “no” or “not now,” respond, “OK, if you change your mind, let me know.” Or, “Maybe I’ll ask you again someday, if it is OK with you.”

A parallel situation is one in which the person has been to church more or less regularly for several months and seems to feel blessed by it. You might feel free to ask, “I’ve been wondering if you would like to be baptized and join our church?” In some situations a person may be thinking, “How do I join this group?” If that is on their mind and no one opens the door, then they may feel screened out. They may conclude, “I guess I am not good enough.”

To sum up, pray unceasingly and be as sensitive as you know how to the signals that the person gives you. Be ever ready to drop it and change the subject. Be ready to give a sincere apology whenever you sense you have made someone uncomfortable. Yes, there are rare occasions when things have to be dealt with, faced and conquered, but special training is required for that. Your task is to be a good friend who will simply love and support the person as you try to gently lead someone closer to the Lord.

One important thing to remember is that you cannot keep filling everyone’s glasses if you don’t refill your pitcher as often as needed. This applies not only to drinking water, but even more so to “living water,” as Christ referred to spiritual things in John 4. Never allow yourself to take on so many assignments that you skip or scrimp on your private devotional time. That is a sure and rapid way to develop burnout. and can lead to unintentionally doing more harm than good. If you have a spouse or family, do not neglect them; they are your first mission field. You can include them in your ministry from time to time, but they also need alone time with you.

“Trying to get someone closer to God is rather like trying to get water into a straw,” notes one teacher. “To push from the bottom is fatiguing, frustrating and futile. Try drawing gently from a higher plane.”

Handout in this Package

1. Take-Home Summary on Pastoral Visiting



Additional Resources

Andrews University Social Work Department (2002). *Helping Hurting Members*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource.

Chadwick, John and Patricia (2002). *The Complete Guide to Pastoral Visitation*. Self-published by the authors.

Hobbs, Richard C. (2006). *Hospital Visitation Ministry*. Alma, AR: Mercy Street Ministries. Available free of charge as a PDF at: mercystreet.com/Hospital_Visitation_files/Hospital_Visitation_Ministry_small.pdf

Gorsuch, Nancy J. (1999). *Pastoral Visitation* (Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling). Minneapolis: Augsburg Books.

Just, A. A., Jr. and Kinneman, S. A. (2008). *Visitation*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

Lyle, Bradford (1984). *Building Relationships Through Pastoral Visitation*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

Searle, David and Short, David (2005). *Pastoral Visitation: A Pocket Manual*. Geanies, Scotland: Christian Focus.

Wells, John D. (1892). *Pastor in the Sick Room*. Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books. (This is a classic text on visitation of the ill.)

Periodical Articles

Brudzynski, Anna (2007). "Pastoral Visitation: Jesus the Master Healer Shows the Way," *Pastoral Presence*, March. Trenton, NJ: Diocese of Trenton.

Ministry, the official journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for pastors, published by the Ministerial Association, includes many articles on the topic of visitation. You can gain access to these at www.ministrymagazine.org/archive

Training Seminar Kits

General Conference Women's Ministries (2005). *Principles of Visitation*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. (Instructor's outline for a one-session workshop. An accompanying CD provides PowerPoint slides.)

Maxson, Ben (1996). *Learning to Care*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. (The package includes an Instructor's Guide and Participant Book.)

Websites

An Evangelical pastor wrote an interesting blog series on visitation guidelines with a number of comments from other bloggers. This can be read at the following site: preacherthoughts.blogspot.com/2006/11/pastoral-visitation-links-to-series.html

Andrew Webb is a conservative Presbyterian pastor who explained his approach to pastoral visitation in a blog from 2007. You can read his notes at: biblebased.wordpress.com/2007/10/04/on-pastoral-visitation

Bethquick.com is the blog of a United Methodist pastor by the name of Elizabeth Quick. She shared an interesting first-hand description of a survey she took of other pastors regarding how they organize and conduct visitation in their churches in July of 2005. See: www.bethquick.com/2005/07/pastoral-visitation-survey-responses.html

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Working
with Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Member
Care:**
Visitation

Discussion Questions

1. Did you grow up with the idea that the paid pastor would visit everyone? What has changed? How do you feel about these changes?
2. Share a time when you were helped or encouraged by a visit of a pastor or elder or other church member. Be as specific as you can about the reasons this visit helped you.
3. Think of a time (without sharing any details) when you were hurt by a visit or phone call. Why was it hurtful? Do you think the person intended to hurt you?
4. Whom have you visited and why?
5. What categories of people are you uncomfortable in visiting? Why?
6. Can you share a brief story of a time when you visited a church member, former member or potential member and had a positive experience?

Group Activity

Purpose: To practice setting up visits through the use of role play.

Preparation: Prepare ahead of time several slips of paper with various scenarios on them, such as:

“You are a church member, but have not attended for several months. You left because of a bad situation and would like to return, but are hurt that no one has contacted you before.”

“You were raised in church but left as a young adult and now don’t believe you need God.”

“You are moving into a new house, having just relocated from another state, and wondering how you will fit into the neighborhood.”

“You are a church member who hasn’t been feeling well for several weeks, and have just been diagnosed with mononucleosis.”

“You are 87 years old, still fairly healthy and in your own home, but heavier tasks, such as replacing screens or storm windows or pruning in season, have become too much for you and the place is beginning to look a little ‘seedy’, but you can’t afford to hire anyone and don’t feel right about getting free help.”

Each scenario also needs a matching slip of paper or card with an explanation for a caller. “This person is a church member, but has not attended for several months,” etc. If you use paper of various colors, you can use the same color for each pair. If you don’t have colored paper available, number each pair with the same number. Then after the first volunteer draws a slip, you will know which slip to give the second volunteer, and so on. Tell this second volunteer to call the first one to schedule a visit.

Assignment: Ask for two volunteers to come forward. One of them will draw a slip of paper from a small bowl, box or basket. You will then give the other one the corresponding slip. They may use cell phones or just pretend they have phones. The caller is to attempt to make a first contact and set up an appointment for a visit. The person they are calling may decide whether to be agreeable or to role play anger or resistance.

Seat them in chairs, shoulder to shoulder, facing in opposite directions so they do not have eye contact, but can easily hear one another. Start the conversation by making a ringing sound, perhaps with your cell phone.

Debrief: Share what you learned from the exercise, including any feelings, reactions, and personal stories brought up by this exercise.

Time: Allow three to five minutes per phone call and at least 15 minutes for the whole group to debrief.

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Working
with Jesus

Group
Activities

**Member
Care:**
Visitation

Handout 1

Take-Home Summary on Visitation

The Lord has admonished us to visit those in distress (Matthew 25:36, James 1:27).

Sensitivity and discretion should be used in deciding who visits whom.

Those visited should include: newcomers and visitors; the ill or bereaved; the overwhelmed; and backsliders.

Our churches, in addition to being places to worship God and spread the Gospel, should provide us with “spiritual families.” Sometimes these form spontaneously; sometimes they need a little nudge. Someone should see that no one falls through the cracks. This is especially important in large churches. People often stop attending church when they feel they have no real friends there and that no one will miss them if they don’t show up.

Visiting is not just chatting. Try to ascertain what a person’s needs are: spiritual, social, physical and/or chore services. Do not, however, push your agenda on anyone. If they need help, try to help them see that they can give in return—of their friendship, love and wisdom

Your highest goal is to bring people to Jesus, but try not to let them suspect this. First you become genuine friends.

Give love, sympathy and help freely, when needed, but stop shy of “enabling” people to continue shirking their own responsibilities.

Humor is OK as long as it hurts no one. Laugh with, not at, others, and if they aren’t laughing, stop and apologize.

Share information and ask questions in a friendly, interested manner, not bossy or as if you are conducting an inquisition.

Visits can take place in parks, cafes, libraries as well as private homes. Look for a neutral place where you both can relax and be natural. Learn to recognize your own limits and when to call on others for help. Sometimes this may be a professional.

If rejection blocks your best efforts, be friendly and respectful anyway. If someone slams the door, leave it open on your side, so to speak.

“A word fitly spoken and in due season is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”
(Proverbs 25:11, The Amplified Bible)