



# SESSION FIVE: HELPING THROUGH QUESTIONS, STRUGGLE AND HARDSHIP

## **SESSION TOPICS**

- How to help when they're going through crisis
- Those questions you don't know the answer to
- When to refer to a professional counselor



**One of the most common concerns people have about discipling someone is the feeling of inadequacy to help someone who's struggling. Make no mistake, there will be times when the person you meet with brings up a hardship or crisis. This session will share some best-practices and resources that can help you guide someone through their challenge, offering support, encouragement and prayer along the way.**

## How to help through hardship

When someone shares an issue that is causing disruption in their lives, they're most likely not expecting you to rescue them. What they need is a friend who is present, grounded and comforting.

- **Listen.** Limit your own opinions and advice. Let them grieve and talk through their feelings.
- **Reaffirm God's character.** Remind them of God's presence in their suffering, His love for them, His goodness to them in Christ, and His grace and mercy in their time of need.
- **Don't try to explain what you do not know.** Don't feel compelled to answer their 'why' questions. It's okay to say, "I don't know." Focus instead on the foundational truths you do know.
- **Pray with and for them.** Often when we're overwhelmed, we don't know how to pray or we lack the strength. Pray for comfort, wisdom and for the strength to persevere.
- **Think practically about how to serve them.** Ask them how you can help them. Anticipate tasks and responsibilities you might handle for them, but ask their permission first.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for outside help.** Seek wisdom from others with more knowledge on how best to help them. If needed, refer them to a pastor, counselor or support group.
- **Take the detour.** Be willing to set aside your current study to go through a resource that directly addresses their issue. (See recommendations at end of this session.)



## Those questions you don't know the answer to

It's inevitable – at some point you will be asked to explain something that you don't have a ready answer for. Fear not! This actually presents a fantastic teachable moment for them, and can even help address the 'dependency on you' pothole that we talked about in Session 3.

Rather than make up an answer or share your uninformed opinion, the safest way to handle these moments is to say, "I'm glad that you're thinking about these matters and want to understand them better. That's a great question that I don't have a ready answer for. Let's both research that this week and see what we come back with. For now, let's move on, but we'll pick up there next week." Before your next meeting, spend time praying for God to clarify this for you.

Read some commentary or ask someone you trust for biblical wisdom. It's important that you come the next week having investigated the subject yourself, and it's equally as important that they have done the same.

*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*

## Resources for life struggles

When you need to take a detour from your discipleship material to explore a topical study that addresses a need or struggle, use prayerful discernment about which resources to use. Here are some trusted sources with a rich library of topics you might find helpful:

### **CBMC Advancement System**

- Click the LIBRARY tab at the top of the screen and search for your topic
- Some are short, scripture-based exercises to help you explore what the Bible says on the topic
- Others are videos or segments from a study that speak to the subject

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[advance.cbmc.com](http://advance.cbmc.com)

### **Our Daily Bread – Discovery Series**

- Use the drop-down menu to find studies in various categories
- These topical studies can be used in personal, discipleship or small group study
- There are over 150 topics ranging from relationships, job loss, depression, parenting, finances, fear, anger, grief and more

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[discoveryseries.org](http://discoveryseries.org)

## When to refer to a professional counselor

There might be times when the person you're meeting with needs counsel or expertise beyond what you can offer. It's time to refer when ...

1. you do not have the skills to counsel in this particular situation
2. you do not have the time to counsel properly
3. extra attention is given by you to the hurting person in a way that is increasingly at the expense of your own family
4. it begins to feel uncomfortable for either of you
5. you begin to over-identify with the hurting person's problem
6. you find it increasingly difficult to maintain confidentiality
7. you have no backup or support system to help with troubling situations
8. there are serious threats or risks to the health, safety or welfare of the hurting person, others, or yourself

If you refer someone to a pastor or counselor, ask the counselor what level of involvement you should have while they're counseling the person. It's important that your empathy and well-intentioned support doesn't contradict anything they're hearing from the counselor. They might prefer that you discontinue your regular meetings during that period.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**1. Why should we refrain from giving advice when people are struggling and going through a tough time? What could we do instead?**

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**2. What promises of God do you hold tightly to when you are going through hardship?**

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# APPENDIX B: WHAT TO SAY WHEN THEY'RE HURTING

What do you say to someone who is in the middle of a crisis? It is just as important to know what not to say, because saying the wrong thing at the wrong time could sever the possibility for ministry and cause more pain.

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## What Not to Say:

- I know how you feel
- How are you doing? Are you okay?
- You'll feel better before you know it
- You'll get through it
- Don't cry. Be strong
- God must have needed them
- The Lord gives and the Lord takes away
- Don't let it rob your joy
- Anything that tells the person how to feel
- Any personal stories that compare this grief or loss to some other grief or loss

## What to Say Instead:

- I'm sorry this has happened
- I cannot imagine how difficult this is for you
- I'm here for you
- How are you holding up?
- May I take a moment to pray for you?
- Is there some way I can help you?
- Assurances from scripture
- Open-ended questions (What was it like?)