

Hospital Visitation

BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. When Small Group members are hospitalized, it is an important time of ministry for Small Group Leaders and their Interns. During these times of crisis, people are more open spiritually and they need the support, prayer, and ministry that the Small Group and its leadership can offer.
2. As the Small Group Leader, you are the primary pastoral minister to those in your Small Group who are hospitalized. At times your Small Group Pastor or other church staff will also be involved. But you are uniquely positioned to touch this person and their family through your personal ministry and the involvement of other Small Group members.
3. People in the hospital are usually weak physically and emotionally. At these times in their lives, they need priestly ministry—that is, they need someone who can stand between them and God conveying His love and strength. We sometimes misunderstand the “priesthood of all believers,” thinking that it means that none of us are priests. In fact, it means that all of us are priests. Sometimes I will need you to be a priest for me, and at other times you will need me to be a priest for you. Those hospitalized often need our pastoral/priestly ministry as we pray and touch their lives.
4. When you visit someone in the hospital, your main goal is to let them know that you care and that God cares. If people feel loved and cared for, you’ve accomplished your major objective.
5. When Small Group Leaders are hospitalized, they need the ministry of their Small Group Coaches.

Do’s

1. When you learn that someone in your Small Group has been hospitalized because of a major illness or an unexpected accident, contact them or their family as soon as possible. Tell them that you’re praying for them and that you will be involving the rest of the Small Group in prayer.
2. Contact your Small Group Pastor or the church office to let them know who is hospitalized. Although you and your Small Group will be offering the primary care, your Coach and Small Group Pastor will want to be informed and involved.
3. As you plan your hospital visit, consider taking another Small Group member with you. Jesus sent His disciples out to minister two by two because this is an effective pattern. This won’t always be possible, but when it is it allows you to offer the gifts and support of someone else as they themselves learn new ministry skills.
4. Almost all hospitals have a chapel. When you arrive at the hospital to make your visit, go to the chapel to spend five or ten minutes in prayer. Pray for the person and their family, and ask God for any special instructions He has for you as you minister to them. Listen.
5. Do more listening than talking when you visit.
6. Look and listen for needs beyond the words that people say.

7. Pray with the person before you leave. You can initiate this by saying, “I’d like to pray with you before I go.” As you pray, communicate care through touch by holding their hand or resting your hand on their shoulder.

DON’TS

1. Don’t thoughtlessly share stories about your own illnesses or experiences of those close to you.
2. Don’t **say** or **imply** that someone is sick because of their lack of faith.
3. Don’t feel pressured to read Scripture. Share a verse or passage if it seems appropriate, but don’t force it.
4. Don’t stay too long. Ten to fifteen minutes should serve as an average.
5. Don’t go in a room if the door is closed. When this is the case, ask at the nurses’ station to see if it is okay to enter.
6. Don’t violate hospital policies such as visiting hours.

WHAT IF . . .

1. Someone is having surgery:
 - Visit them earlier in the day or the evening before. In this way you will not be interrupted by or interfere with preparations for surgery.
 - Consider sharing communion with them.
 - Possibly read Psalms 121 to them. It recalls that God who watches over them “will not slumber nor sleep” (verse 4), and that “The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (verse 9).
2. Someone has a baby:
 - Don’t visit them immediately! Give them a night to rest before your visit.
 - Pray for this new life inviting the Holy Spirit to be active in preparing its heart to receive Christ and serve Him.
 - Invite God’s blessing upon the entire family and home.
3. Someone is dying:
 - Call your Coach and Small Group Pastor immediately, even if it is the middle of the night. They want to be involved in ministry to the person and their family at this time.
 - Listen and care for people, resisting the temptation to argue with the feelings of denial and anger which are a natural part of the grief process.
 - Sit with people. Just be there. It’s not what you say, but the fact that you were there that communicates concern at times like this.