

LESSON 11

MINISTRY TO PERSONS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Introduction

Aims

1. To present the challenge of ministry to persons who are involved in some kind of crisis.
2. To emphasize the theory of how to minister in crisis situations.
3. To show that there are basically two kinds of crises.
4. To illustrate crisis intervention ministry.

Sooner or later each of us is involved in a crisis of some kind or another. For some it may be a critical incident which changes completely the direction of one's life. For others it may be passing through the normal stages of life's experiences in the day by day and year by year manner without the intense feelings that are involved in emergencies.

One of the greatest opportunities that comes to pastors is the experience of being able to accompany people in the critical moments. For this reason the present chapter will emphasize the importance of presence as a primary influence upon others when they are hurting. In addition to, and in spite of, what one says at times of crisis, people will not forget the fact that their pastor was willing to walk with them through the crucible of suffering. They will overlook many other omissions, but it is hard to overlook negligence at this time.

The Meaning of Crisis

The word "crisis" means "crucial time," or a "turning point" in the course of events. Tradition has it that the word comes from two Chinese characters which mean "danger" and "opportunity." All of these concepts have their relevance within the framework of the use that we shall be making of the term. In the present lesson we shall look at the way in which critical events create opportunities for the minister to be effective in a dimension that would not be possible in other circumstances.

Life in the crucible

Wilbur E. Morley, in an article on the theory of crisis intervention, presents a concept with a diagram that is helpful to see the situation that people who are in crisis face and what the results of the crisis are.¹ When things are moving normally in one's life, his world may be likened to the triangle which is resting on its base with a certain degree of stability. One is either moving steadily in the direction of better emotional health or more sickness, depending upon the many different factors that are at work in his life. But when a crisis develops, the triangle immediately stands on

Restate the aims of this lesson in your own words.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

One of the greatest opportunities that comes to pastors is the experience of being able to _____ people in the _____ moments.

(accompany, critical)

Define crisis _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

one of its points or angles. This means that the life of the person has become momentarily unstable, and the end result could be a person with less emotional stability. It also could result in a person's having more spiritual and emotional stability. The direction that his life takes in this moment of crisis will be determined by the severity of the crisis, his coping mechanisms, and the contributions of the significant people who surround him at this difficult time. Support from friends, relatives, and the pastor is decisive for future health and well-being. At the time of a crisis a person tends to be more easily influenced than when things are normal. This is why some turn to alcohol or drugs in a crisis, while others turn to God for spiritual help. Much depends upon the sense of values of the persons who come into contact with those who are experiencing the crisis.

Moments of decision

Most ministers have had the experience of trying to help a person who is in the clutches of a crisis. This person may turn to God for the first time or rededicate his life, or make other vows about the different kind of life that he is going to live when he gets out of the present difficulty. A few days later the minister may visit when the worst part of the critical stage has passed, and he finds the person cold and indifferent to the minister. He acts as if he has already forgotten the determinations that he made just a few days previously. This is seen in the experience of a hospital employee who faced open heart surgery. The doctors explained to him the potential dangers of the surgery. As a result the patient called his brother, who is a minister, with whom he had been estranged for several years. He experienced reconciliation with him, and confessed his shortcomings to God in his brother's presence. Then he wrote letters relating to all his business matters and making disposition of investments and other properties. He instructed his wife as to procedures that she should follow if he did not make it through the surgery. The few hours immediately before the surgery were spent in verbalizing with his brother and wife his feelings about spiritual matters in life. These had been neglected, he admitted, but he trusted that the Lord would forgive him. They prayed for God's help for the surgeons during the operation.

The patient made it fine through the surgery. A week later I visited him, and was surprised to find his attitude completely changed. He had regressed to his critical attitude towards his brother and the church. He was once more very much interested in material matters. He made no reference to the commitments that he had made just before surgery.

The pastor will have people to react in this manner. He will also have experiences in which people continue with their commitments. The point is that when one is facing a critical situation, his life is more easily influenced. The minister will take advantage of this situation, be active in helping people as much as he can, and not be devastated when people forget their commitments once the crisis has passed.

List the factors that influence the direction one's life will take during a crisis.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Why did the man in the illustration in the adjacent paragraph make the decision that he did? Why did he react the way he did after his surgery was successful? What does this incident illustrate for us?

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The point is that when one is facing a critical situation, his life is more easily _____.

(influenced)

The wise pastor will help people to be more objective and not encourage extreme commitments which may be regretted after the crisis is passed. He will recognize some extreme commitments as an evidence of emotional turmoil or sickness rather than mature emotional health and sincere dedication to the Lord. For instance, when one's child is ill, the father may make vows of commitment to the minister which appear to be beyond the point of wisdom. The minister may gently suggest that the person think the matter over before he makes a decision of that much consequence. One man wanted to go to the bank and borrow a large sum of money to give a special gift to all the hospital employees who had taken care of his wife during her terminal illness. His intense grief prompted him to think in this manner. He did not realize that it was against hospital policy for employees to receive special gifts of this nature. He would have involved himself in additional debts, which would have further complicated his precarious financial condition due to his wife's illness. He was encouraged by the chaplain to express verbally his appreciation without attempting to make any monetary gifts. He did so, felt much better, and avoided creating problems for the hospital administration.

The Dynamics of a Crisis

Doctor Stanley Stanoff, a prominent psychiatrist in one of the major cities in the United States, has mentioned the relationship between the critical event and the emotional response on the part of those affected. He shows how at the time of the crisis the emotional involvement is so close that the person is completely incapacitated to think logically. In six weeks he will be able to think differently about the loss and look at his feelings. Six months later he will have a still more distant feeling, and can verbalize with more logic than before. Six years later it is amazing how separate the experience is from the emotional attachment. This explains how it is possible for the person to become emotionally detached from another through the passing of time. People can form new alliances after a time of grief. It also helps us to know what not to expect from a person who is in the throes of a critical event—logically based decisions.

Another important concept that is related to crisis intervention has been developed by Larry Bugen.² He states that the degree of preventableness or unpreventableness of the crisis will affect the emotional reactions of the person. For instance, when one is terminally ill and lingers for a long period of time before death, the family members usually engage in anticipatory grief and are more prepared to face the moment of death. At times they will feel relief because they realize that their loved one is no longer suffering. On the contrary, when an accident that could have been prevented occurs that brings sudden death, the reaction tends to be much more intense. The grief reaction will be more dramatic. It may even be violent. It will also continue for a longer time than if the death had been expected.

Not all extreme commitments made during a crisis are an expression of sincere dedication to the Lord, but rather may be evidence of emotional _____ or _____

(turmoil, sickness)

Dr. Stanley Stanoff states that there is a relationship between the _____ event and the _____ response of those affected by a crisis situation.

(critical, emotional)

Larry Bugen states that the emotional reactions of a person in a crisis are affected by the degree of _____ or _____.

(preventableness, unpreventableness)

Another factor that is at work in the dynamic is the degree of relationship with the person involved in the crisis. If one's spouse is involved in an accident and dies, it will cause a much more intense reaction than if the spouse dies of a long term illness. At the same time, if one's uncle whom he has not seen for several years suddenly dies, it still will not cause as intense a reaction than the sudden death of a friend that one sees frequently. So we see that the conditions surrounding the crisis as well as the degree of relationship with those involved in the crisis will influence the intensity of the reaction and the length of time that it takes to adjust to the crisis.

Kinds of Crises

Developmental crises

The developmental crises are those which come to people as they pass through the normal stages of life. Beginning school, starting to work on one's first paying job, getting married, starting to college, leaving home, graduating from college, having one's first child, changing place of employment, getting fired, and facing retirement are all "primary moments" in life, and involve a great many intense emotions. Even though we try to prepare for each of these experiences, there is some degree of shock that comes at the moment when they occur. Some experiences involve anxiety and insecurity; others involve satisfaction and contentment. We all seek to look for the company of others in critical times. If it is an unhappy or unpleasant experience, we need to have a chance to talk over our feelings. If we are happy, we look for others with whom we can celebrate in our moments of delight. For this reason the pastor and other Christian leaders can be very significant people for us at times like these. The church is wise in having special recognition for the people who achieve in secular as well as Christian activities. It should also have a ministry to those whose crises are not times of rejoicing.

People need to have opportunities to receive help from the pastor and church staff as they face these developmental crises. Good books are available to give information and inspiration and thereby prepare people for these events. Good anticipatory preparation can take the rough edges off those experiences which represent a blow to our ego. For instance, people who prepare for retirement, both economically and emotionally, are able to change gears and make the transition without serious difficulty. They plan to get involved in meaningful business sidelines, hobbies, or other activities which give them satisfaction, occupy their time, and help them to feel of significance. Changing one's place of employment after several years with the same company may serve as the right stimulus to keep a person fresh and creative.

Accidental crises

The kinds of crises that will claim most of our attention as pastors and ministers will be those accidental crises.

The degree of relationship with the person involved in the crisis is another _____ in the

(factor, dynamic)

As people pass through the normal stages of life they undergo _____ crises.

(developmental)

Is the following statement true or false?

Since developmental crises are normal stages through which people go, churches do not need to be involved in this area of people's lives. _____

(false)

These are experiences that come on suddenly, threaten our well-being for a time, and then pass over a period of days or weeks. The person will be different as a result of this crisis. Illustrations of these crises are sudden serious illnesses, accidents which leave people crippled or invalids, the discovery that one's child or close friends is involved seriously with drugs, problems with the law, the infidelity of one's spouse, the death of a loved one, and sudden dismissal from one's place of employment. Each of these cases would have a special set of dynamics that accompany them, depending upon the special circumstances, degree of relationship, individual personality of the people involved, and the emotional and temperamental makeup of those enmeshed in a crisis. Some people have a basic emotional stability about themselves which makes it possible for them to withstand these critical incidents without being devastated. Others "cave in" at the slightest provocation. If a person has experienced previous losses, he will more likely be able to cope more readily with this one. This is especially true if he worked through the previous crisis in a healthful manner.

What is the immediate reaction of the person who receives news of some tragedy? Usually the person is visibly affected. He may cry, shout, or laugh. If there is no emotional reaction, this may indicate the possibility of problems later on. Denial mechanisms are at work. The pastor will talk with the person in hopes of getting him to let his emotions flow. The person may be stunned by the news. Disbelief may be the predominant attitude for a time. Usually the sympathetic touch of a person who means a lot to the family member will bring forth some emotional expression.

The writer has had opportunity to observe a wide variety of reactions while serving as chaplain in a general and surgical hospital. When the surgeon brings the news that the loved one did not make it through the surgery, some people become hysterical immediately. I saw a woman run shouting through the halls of the hospital in Paraguay when she was told that her husband had died. I also stood at the side of a middle-aged man who matter of factly asked me what papers he needed to sign so he could leave the hospital as quickly as possible after the doctors had pronounced his wife as dead. The vast difference in the reactions of these two illustrations may be explained by sexual differences, cultural differences, temperamental differences, and circumstantial differences. All these differences can be discussed at length with profit.

The pastor is called upon to minister to all people, but he should especially try to facilitate the expression of feeling with those who appear to have no emotional reaction. If he can develop a relationship of confidence with the person, usually this person will appreciate his attempts to be helpful. It is not wise to have a pattern of expectations for every person to follow in a stereotyped fashion. The presence of the pastor to pray quietly with the family, to converse softly about the meaning of the life of the one

List examples of accidental crises.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The pastor will talk with the person in hopes of getting him to let his _____ flow.

(emotions)

List important elements in helping people through accidental crises.

involved in the crisis, and the assurance of one's availability for future ministry are the important elements. The sensitive pastor can capture the expectations of the persons present and respond accordingly.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Steps in Ministry in Crises

Warren L. Jones has presented the "A-B-C's" of crisis intervention in three basic steps.³ They are: (1) Achieve contact with the person in crisis. (2) Boil down the crisis to its essentials. (3) Cope actively through an inventory of the client's ingenuity and resources. We shall look more closely as we move along in this process at these steps.

Achieve contact

Many times the pastor will already have established contact with those in crisis as he has ministered to them weekly through the worship services and other ministries through the years. It is much easier to move in and minister when the relationship of trust has already been developed previously. I felt this keenly as chaplain in the hospital. If I had been by and visited the family prior to surgery, my return visit began on a more intimate level than if I went to them for the first time after surgery. My daily ministry in the visiting area just outside the intensive care unit in the hospital kept me moving in varying degrees of intimacy with different families as their loved ones came and went. Usually the folks who had been there for several days, keeping constant vigil over their loved one in intensive care, prepared the way for ministry as new families arrived. They usually introduced me as chaplain who spent time with them and prayed with them.

When the pastor appears at the emergency room of the hospital, hopefully he will be well received by the staff because of his previous ministries there. People will recognize him as a man of God and will look to him for spiritual resources immediately. The pastor has the open door to inquire of the family just what has happened and prepare his ministry accordingly.

The pastor will be alert to capture initial indications of guilt or the tendency to place blame on the part of the person involved in a crisis. This will indicate a more extensive ministry in the future. He should make a mental note of these matters, and be alert to opportunities to minister as subsequent conditions permit. When several people are involved in a crisis, he should circulate among the different victims and family members in order to be available to minister where there is the greatest need.

When strangers come to the pastor with a critical situation, it is important to learn certain facts about the person and the situation. Who is the person? What is the current problem as this person sees it? Why has the person come for help now? Why did the person seek out a

Give the "A-B-C's" of crisis intervention.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Many times the pastor will already have established _____ with those in _____.

(contact, crisis)

It is hoped that the pastor will be well received at the hospital because of his _____ ministries _____.

(past, there)

The pastor needs to get certain information from _____.

(strangers)

clergyman? From whom else has the person sought help? Who else is involved in the crisis? What does the person expect the pastor to do? The answers to these questions will give the pastor a perspective which will guide him in his plan of action in ministry. He can assess the situation realistically and develop a plan for giving the best kind of help that he possibly can.

Most people who are not members of the church will come to the pastor because some church member has encouraged him to do so. The pastor should respond readily to these people. The person will trust him because of what he has heard previously about the pastor's ability. Some who need help will be hesitant and vacillate for a time before actually seeking it.

Boil the crisis down to its essentials

The person who comes for help because of a crisis will not be able to talk logically. They will probably be expressing a lot of emotions simultaneously. The pastor will be able to facilitate catharsis as he listens attentively to the story of what has happened. The person will not be attempting to relate the different facts that he is expressing. It will be the responsibility of the pastor to assess the situation and boil the problem down to its components. It will be helpful to the person if the pastor can point out the most serious aspect of the situation. He may be able to synthesize the problems to one central difficulty. It will be helpful to the person to focus on one specific area for a time. Upon solving this facet, others may be eliminated or placed in a new perspective.

Many times persons are hesitant to seek psychiatric help because they fear that the psychiatrist will find that they have so many difficulties that it will overwhelm them. This is erroneous thinking, because most of our problems stem from one basic difficulty. Our other problems are further complications which are the fruit of this malady. The psychiatrist will not "discover" one's problem; he will help the person to become aware of his own difficulty and take steps to cope with it in the most acceptable manner.

Many who come for help will have bottled-up emotions that need to be expressed. They may express anger, frustration, guilt, anxiety, grief, shame, and many other emotions. As they unburden themselves in an illogical manner, relief will come. He will be able to relax. He will then be able to talk more logically about what is happening in his life and the steps that he should take to face the situation. The discovery that someone cares about him and his problem will be a source of encouragement.

Frequently it can be noted that the basic problem that most people have is that some need has not been or is not being satisfied at the present time. These unmet needs manifest themselves in many different symptoms. They may express themselves in psychosomatic sicknesses. Doctors make different kinds of tests, but can find no organic basis for the illness. These people feel pain and have somatic symptoms, but the problem cannot be identified in

How would you achieve contact with the following persons experiencing a crisis: A member of your congregation, a stranger who calls on you for help?

(Compare your answers with the text.)

It will be the responsibility of the pastor to _____ the situation and _____ the problem down to its _____.

(assess, boil, components)

the malfunction of some organ of the body. We conclude that they have emotionally induced illnesses. When one helps them to deal with the unmet need in their life, their symptoms disappear. The pastor can recognize these unmet needs more quickly than the people. He can offer possible solutions, which, if attempted, may solve the immediate difficulty.

The process of "boiling down" the problem will vary with the nature of the problem. If it is some emergency situation, then quick action on the part of the pastor will be necessary. When the immediate crisis is over, the pastor can then talk more at length and over an extended period of time to help the person to isolate factors and deal with the most critical phases of his way of adjustment.

Cope constructively with the crisis

Coping with one's problems will involve making decisions that can change the direction in which one is moving in his life. He may need to establish new goals and set up a new course of action in order to meet these goals. The person is helped to see that things can be different in his life. He can be made to see that he must be an active change agent as he plans his future. The pastor can mention traits of the person's personality which serve as strengths and advantages as he moves in new directions for future actions. The stimulus of confidence expressed at a critical time can change the course of one's life.

I experienced this personally as a seventeen-year-old youth who was just finishing high school and had uncertain plans for the future. The decision to go to college was a result of the significant people in the church who instilled in me a greater confidence in myself and my future than I had previously had. The decision to enter graduate school after seminary training was the result of the stimulus of a friend who is now in the presence of the Lord. The choice of a place of ministry was the result of a special appeal of one who showed interest in me and my gifts in teaching. All these illustrations seek to say that we, as helpers, can have significant influence upon those who are seeking to cope with their situation, whether it be a critical accidental crisis or a developmental one.

The alert pastor will call attention to one's abilities as a means of helping him to cope with the crisis in his life. When one is facing a critical situation, he tends to feel that his world has collapsed, that he is powerless, and that his future is destroyed. He can be helped by calling out the reservoir of his own strengths by appealing to his gifts and his potential. He must be made to see that life does continue. In time he will see things from a different perspective. The pastor can also help the person to take responsibility for his life and control the inner and external circumstances in order to make the most of the difficulty that has come to him.

Edgar Jackson gives his book on crisis counselling the title, *Coping with the Crises in Your Life*, which is to focus especially on this stage of the process.⁴ He discusses the

The process of "boiling down" the problem will _____ with the _____ of the problem.

(vary, nature)

Is the following statement true or false?

Coping with one's problems will involve making decisions that can change the direction in which one is moving in his life. _____

(true)

The alert pastor will call attention to one's abilities as a means of helping him to _____ with the _____ in his life.

(cope, crisis)

developmental, as well as the accidental crises in his book, and emphasizes the need to use spiritual resources in coping with those critical experiences that come to all of us.

A part of coping with crisis is coming to grips with the external forces that work in our world. We can appeal to many external sources of help that are available. The person who has problems with alcohol should take the initiative to seek help through organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, which offer assistance to those in these conditions. The same is true about rehabilitation centres which offer assistance to those involved in drugs. In some communities there may be government agencies which offer help to people with different kinds of problems.

The pastor will help the person to think about all the possibilities as ways of coping with the crisis. He guides the person to consider the potential results of each course of action. The person will eliminate some of the possibilities as being undesirable or as bringing consequences which the person is not ready to face. As a result of this process the person will eliminate all but one or two possibilities. He will be encouraged to take additional time in order to meditate upon his course of action. He should be encouraged to pray for divine guidance.

A facet in the decision making process is a consideration of the cost, both emotional and economic, of making a mistake. How costly will it be to make a choice that is later discovered to be the wrong one? Can the decision be reversed? How costly will it be to back up and move in a different direction? For instance, if a man of fifty is considering the possibility of a change of employment, he needs to look at the issue from every perspective. Will he be able to get a different job? What happens if he is not satisfied in that new job? Would there be any possibility of returning to his former job should he desire to do so? These factors may cause one to see that it would be better for him to remain in the position that he now has.

The pastor should avoid creating an attitude of dependency on the part of those seeking help. In some cultures this is a greater problem than in others. Some centres that specialize in crisis intervention place a maximum of six times that they will see a client, in order to prevent the tendency to become dependent upon others for help. It is quite possible to give the kind of help that most people need in a few sessions. From the beginning the pastor will orient the person to the fact that he will assume responsibility for himself and his future within a few weeks.

The pastor must avoid making the decisions for the counsellee. He should inquire if the counsellee feels good about the course of action that has been discussed and if he can claim it as his own decision. The pastor will present the various alternatives, but he should not make the decision as to the course of action to follow. When the person has made a choice, the pastor can affirm this decision and help the person to get underway in carrying out the decision that he has made. Sometimes the first steps are the most difficult, because they may represent moving into unknown or

A part of coping with a crisis is coming to grips with the external forces that work in our _____.

(world)

The pastor will help the person to think about all the _____ as ways of _____ with the crisis.

(possibilities, coping)

The pastor should avoid creating an attitude of _____ on the part of those seeking _____.

(dependency, help)

The pastor must also avoid making _____ for the _____.

(decisions, counsellee)

unfamiliar territory. They may involve a lot of pain. The pastor can go beside the person and encourage him in the first steps into a new way of thinking or acting.

Occasionally the first steps into a new venture will reveal the fact that it was a mistake. When this is true, the pastor can help the person to reverse his course of action and regroup for a new beginning. It is difficult for some people to admit that they have made mistakes. We can open doors for them, figuratively speaking, in order to help them to back up and move into a new direction.

Most people do have resources within themselves and in their contacts with others which can give them the strength which they need to face most of the crises that come. They need the assistance of a significant person to help them to sort out all the emotions that they have that surround a crisis, and help them to plan a course of action for the immediate and more remote future. The pastor will be the person in many cases who can give this sense of stability to a critical situation. The pastor can hold out hope for the person who is caught up in the intensity of a critical experience. Hope is an important element in helping people to cope with all the different experiences of life. When people have hope, they continue to put forth efforts to solve their own problems. Thus the pastor will always look for the evidences of hope that exist in any situation.

The pastor will be the person in many cases who can give this sense of _____ to a _____ situation.

(stability, critical)

Acute Grief Reaction

Just before Christmas a few years ago I received a call to go to the local university hospital because a family, of whom several were active members of a local church, had been involved in a serious motor car accident. We dropped all our activities and went immediately to the emergency entrance of the hospital. As we walked through the entrance, a young man who is a leading member of his local church came towards me. His clothes were bloody, his face was swollen in places with scratches and blood on it, and he fell into my arms with the declaration: "Oh, Doctor Giles, Martha is dead!" Martha was the name of his teen-age daughter who had just finished high school. She was a beautiful Christian young lady who was a leader among the young people's organizations in the church. She had been sitting in the front seat of the Volkswagen panel with her father, while the rest of the family was sitting on the back two seats of the vehicle. The father was driving. He had collided head-on with a truck; Martha was thrown into the windshield; her neck was broken; and she died instantly. In the moments that followed I listened to the father's wails of anguish because of the death of his daughter and the injuries to his wife and other children.

After a few moments we insisted that Hector lie down on one of the stretchers in the hospital. The doctors were busy giving medical attention to his wife. Because of the severe blow on his head he too began to feel groggy. He closed his eyes for a few moments as I wiped the tears from them and sweat from his forehead and neck. In a few moments he opened his eyes and asked the question: "Where

am I?" I responded that he was at the hospital. He asked: "What happened?" I explained that he was in a car crash. He asked: "How is Santiago (his young son)?" I responded that he was fine. "How is Mary (his other daughter)?" I explained that she was fine also. "How is Margaret (his wife)?" I explained that she was injured, but the doctors thought that she would be all right. Then he asked hesitatingly: "How is Martha?" I then told him that she did not make it through the accident, and that she had died. He wrinkled his brow, groaned in anguish, and said: "Oh, no, I killed her." I wiped his face with my handkerchief and tried to console him with the explanation that he could be comforted by knowing that he had been a good father, she was such a fine, beautiful girl, and that he had no regrets about his work in rearing his daughter. After a while he became calm, closed his eyes, and drifted into a light sleep again. But in a few moments he awakened, startled, and repeated the same series of questions. Each time Martha was the last person about whom he asked. Each time as I told him that she had died, he turned his face to the wall and wept with the question: "What am I going to do?" I sat at the side of the stretcher, held his arm and shoulder, and continued to wipe his face and seek to console him about his daughter and the other members of the family. After some time the hospital personnel informed us that they had placed his wife in a private room in another section of the hospital, and that we could go there to be with her. We entered the room, and wept quietly as the husband inclined over the bed, kissed his wife, and held her in his arms as they wept in physical and mental pain and sorrow because of the events of the last few hours.

After a time in the hospital we brought Hector to our home, gave him some warm food, and put him to bed. The following morning I awakened early and went into his room to see how he was doing. When he awakened, he asked: "Where am I?" I explained that we had brought him to our home, and that he had spent the night there. He did not remember what had happened, and I had to explain to him again about the crash. When I explained that Martha had died, he again began to weep and to say: "What am I going to do?" We gave him some breakfast, some of my clean clothes to put on, and took him to the hospital once more to see his wife. The remainder of the day was filled with details related to the funeral service and burial of Martha. Later, he was hospitalized because of physical and emotional exhaustion from all the events of the tragedy. I visited him several times during the following days in an effort to be a source of comfort to him.

The previous experience illustrates how the minister is a vital source of help in critical times. He should go immediately to the persons who are involved in a crisis just as soon as he receives the news. He should make contact with the persons who are most close to the critical event. A Christian handshake, pat on the shoulder, or embrace will communicate one's concern for those involved in the time of suffering. A few words of comfort will be a source of help to

The _____ is a vital _____ of help
in _____ times.

(minister, source, critical)

the persons. The pastor may need to help the people to make some decisions, depending upon the nature of the crisis. If other family members are present, they may be enlisted to help with business details. The physical presence of the pastor and Christian brothers in times like these will always be remembered with gratitude. The pastor and other Christian leaders can engage in silent prayer for God's grace to be made evident in the lives of those involved in a difficult situation.

The reactions of my friend are typical of those who are involved in acute grief. His denial mechanisms were constantly at work, seeking to convince himself that the accident had really not happened, his constant repetition of the series of questions related to the different family members who were in the vehicle indicates how one's innate fears take over at a time of crisis. The pastor must keep in mind the importance of pointing out reality to those who are the victims of some crisis. He will need to repeat to them the details of what happened, in order that their system may be able to assimilate the facts adequately.

The ministry of presence is significant at times like these. The pastor is seen as God's representative, and when he appears on the scene, most people have a feeling of tranquility. Somehow it seems like the picture is not so hopeless, because the messenger of hope is present. The pastor is seen as a person who cares for people. His presence will be seen as an expression of love. Just as Jesus identified with people who were hurting, the minister will be seen walking among the lame, the blind, the hungry, and those who have problems of another nature.

In addition to the physical presence of the pastor, he will have the composure to assess the situation and decide upon the proper course of action. He can inquire if other family members have been informed of the difficulty, and make arrangements to get the word to them. If the police need to be notified, he can suggest that this be done. Usually someone needs to be assigned the responsibility of securing financial help for victims of crises. The pastor can suggest that the most indicated person take over this aspect of giving help. He can enlist ladies in the congregation to go to the home of the family and assist in the many chores that need to be done there.

But these administrative details are not the chief role of the pastor at this time. He should be the source of spiritual assistance. He needs to carry his Bible or a New Testament in his pocket. He can open it from time to time and read portions which offer comfort to those who are in distress. He will speak softly to different people about God's loving care for those in distress. He can engage in short prayers with individuals and with entire groups. His emphasis upon the spiritual will help to bring calmness and confidence to those who are present.

The pastor also can help people to put meaning into what is happening to them. It is not the time to try to explain why God lets accidents happen or why children and young people die in the prime of life. But he can help

The pastor must keep in mind the importance of pointing out _____ to those who are the _____ of some crisis.

(reality, victims)

The ministry of _____ is significant at times like these.

(presence)

The pastor will have the composure to _____ the situation and decide upon the _____ course of action.

(assess, proper)

The pastor should be the _____ of _____ assistance.

(source, spiritual)

The pastor also can help people to get _____ into what is happening to them.

(meaning)

people to seek for the deeper meaning to these questions. He can help people to come into contact with God through the experience of suffering.

Footnotes

¹Wilbur E. Morley, "The Theory of Crisis Intervention," *Pastoral Psychology*, (April, 1970), p. 16.

²Larry Bugen, "Human Grief," mimeographed article made available to Chaplain Interns at Baylor Medical Center, Dallas, Texas, 1978).

³Warren L. Jones, "The A-B-C-Method of Crisis Management," *Mental Hygiene* (January, 1968), pp. 87ff., quoted by Howard W. Stone, *Crisis Counseling* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 32-46.

⁴Edgar N. Jackson, *Coping With the Crises in Your Life* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1974).

Recommended Reading

Charles V. Gerkin, *Crisis Experience in Modern Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979.

Edgar N. Jackson, *Coping With the Crises in Your Life*. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1974.

Howard W. Stone, *Crisis Counseling*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

David Switzer, *The Minister As Crisis Counselor*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity(Levels 1,2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What factors influence the direction one's life will take during and immediately following a crisis situation?_____

2. Show how a crisis will affect the decisions one makes during the crisis._____

3. How can the pastor help people in their decisions during the time of crisis?_____

4. Name three factors at work in the dynamics of a crisis._____

5. What are developmental crises?_____

6. What is an accidental crisis? What are some examples?_____
- _____
- _____
7. How can the pastor help those going through accidental crises?_____
- _____
- _____
8. List the "A-B-C's" of crisis intervention._____
- _____
- _____
9. What does it mean to achieve contact?_____
- _____
- _____
10. What is involved in boiling the crisis down to its essentials?_____
- _____
- _____
11. What does it mean to cope constructively with a crisis?_____
- _____
- _____
12. How may the pastor help people to cope with crises in their lives?_____
- _____
- _____
13. What things must the pastor avoid in helping people cope with a crisis?_____
- _____
- _____

14. What is acute grief?_____

15. How can the pastor help those persons who are experiencing acute grief?_____

16. State the aims of this lesson._____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). Read pages 213-30 in *Pastoral Care in the Church* and answer the following questions.

1. Why should ministers begin vocational counselling with youth?
2. Name areas of vocational concern in which the minister may be called upon for counsel.
3. List five reasons for the minister to conduct pre-marital conferences with couples planning marriage.
4. How may the pastor help his people prepare for death? What resources does the pastor have as he attempts to help prepare his people for death?
5. List five stages of the human experience in which the pastor has opportunity to minister to people.

Advanced activity(Level 3). The following activities are based on the Supplementary reading assignment.

1. Why do Christians need God's guidance in choosing vocations?
2. Why do pastors need to be involved in vocational counselling?

3. Discuss ways the minister and the church may prepare persons for marriage and strengthen Christian family life.
4. When death comes to a member, what can the pastor do?

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss the dynamics of a crisis.
2. Define and discuss developmental and accidental crises.
3. Discuss crisis intervention.
4. Discuss the pastor's ministry to people who are experiencing a crisis. How can the pastor help people cope with crises in their lives?
5. Discuss the pastor's ministry to persons experiencing acute grief.