

TOOLKIT · PARKERMANUEL.COM

Hospital and Crisis Visits

Parker Manuel · Lead pastor, Pinewood Church, Boulder · 20+ years in ministry

Check every name, pronoun and detail before you use this.

Start here

If you are on your way right now, open Resource 1. It fits on one screen.

This kit is for the call you did not plan for. Someone is in the hospital, someone is dying, a family has lost someone suddenly, or a person is in crisis. You are the pastor and you are going.

On a calm day, work through the rest in this order:

1. **Keep Resource 1** where you can find it fast.
2. **Read Resource 2** before the next call comes. Most of it is decisions you make ahead of time.
3. **Use Resource 3** in the room.
4. **Keep Resource 4** close. It is what to say, what to read and what to pray.
5. **Read Resource 5 now, not later.** It covers the dying, sudden loss, and times when someone may be in danger.
6. **Use Resource 6** the week after, for the family and for yourself.

Six resources:

1. When the Call Comes
2. Before You Go
3. In the Room
4. What to Say and Pray
5. The Hardest Visits
6. Afterward, and Caring for Yourself

When the Call Comes

If someone is in danger right now

- **Call 911.**
- **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (United States):** call or text **988**. Call with the person if they are willing.
- Do not leave them alone until help arrives or someone responsible is with them.

The next hour

1. **Call or text the family.** Ask where they are and if now is a good time.
2. **Ask what you are walking into.** One sentence is enough.
3. **Tell one person where you are going.** Take someone with you if it is a home visit, a child, or a volatile situation.
4. **Pray in the car.** Ask God for few words and the right ones.
5. **Go in quietly.** Knock. Say who you are. Sit at eye level. Phone away.
6. **Listen more than you talk.** "I'm so sorry. I'm here." That is enough.
7. **Pray short, by name. Say what happens next.** When you will check in, and who they can call.

You are not there to fix it. You are there so they do not go through it alone.

Before You Go

Why you go

"There are some moments in life that you simply don't miss. You don't weigh the pros and cons. You don't ask whether it's worth the money or whether you can fit it into your schedule. When someone you love is walking through one of life's defining moments, something inside of you immediately says, 'I've got to be there.' Whether it's a wedding, a funeral, a graduation, the birth of a child, or a hospital room, our first instinct isn't, 'Should I go?' It's, 'How quickly can I get there?'"

"We've always believed something bigger than convenience: **it matters that we show up.**"

You will not fix what is wrong in that room. You are not there to fix it. You are there so they do not go through it alone, and to bring the hope of Jesus with you.

What they will remember

"Has there ever been a moment when someone simply showed up for you... and it meant everything?"

"I'll bet you're thinking of someone right now. Maybe they couldn't fix what you were walking through. Maybe they didn't have all the right words. But they were there, and you've never forgotten it."

Read that again before a hard visit. It takes the pressure off your words.

Decide ahead of time

Settle these on a calm day. Write the answers down and give them to whoever answers the phone for your church.

- **How people reach you.** One clear way to tell the church someone is in the hospital or in crisis, and who receives it at night and on your day off.
- **Who goes.** At our church, the pastor makes the serious visits. Trained leaders and Crew leaders (our small group leaders) make the rest. Decide where that line falls for you.
- **How fast.** What gets a visit today, and what gets a call today and a visit this week.
- **Who goes with you.** When you go alone and when you take someone. See "Do not go alone when" below.
- **What stays private.** Nothing is shared with the church, a prayer list or a group chat without the person's permission.
- **Who is on your phone list.** See "Know before you need it" in Resource 5.
- **Who covers for you.** A pastor or leader who goes when you are out of town or sick.

Before you leave

- Call or text the family first if you can. Ask if now is a good time and where they are.
- Ask what you are walking into.
- Check the hospital's visiting rules. Some units limit visitors or hours.
- If you are sick, do not go. Call, and send someone else.
- Tell one person where you are going.
- Pray before you get out of the car.

What to bring

- A small Bible, or the passages in Resource 4 marked on your phone.
- A card with your name and number to leave on the table.
- Nothing that needs explaining. No flowers or food unless you know the unit allows them.
- Decide ahead of time whether you bring oil for anointing (James 5:14-15), and how you explain it when you do.

Do not go alone when

- You are visiting someone of the opposite sex in a private home or a closed room.
- You are visiting a child or teenager without a parent present.
- The situation is volatile, or someone may be a danger to themselves or others. See Resource 5.

Decide ahead of time who you call to come with you on short notice.

In the Room

The first minute

- Knock. Wait to be invited in.
- Clean your hands on the way in and on the way out.
- Say who you are and which church you are from. People on medication may not place you.
- Ask, "Is this an okay time?" If staff are working, step out and wait.
- Sit down if there is a chair. Get to eye level. Do not sit on the bed.
- Put your phone away.

Presence first

"I've watched people bring meals to families who were overwhelmed. I've seen people sit quietly in hospital rooms. I've watched friends pray through impossible situations, help someone move, watch each other's kids, and stand beside one another through loss. None of those moments happened because someone was paid to care. They happened because the Church became a family."

Notice the word "quietly." Job's friends did their best work in the days they sat with him and said nothing (Job 2:11-13). You can do a whole visit well with very few words.

Listen before you speak

"It assumes we'll know each other well enough to recognize when someone is carrying something heavy. You can't carry a burden you never see."

That line is about Galatians 6:2. So ask, and then let them answer.

- "How are you doing today?"
- "What has been the hardest part?"
- "What are you most worried about?"
- "How can I pray for you right now?"

Let silence sit. Let them cry. Let them be angry, even at God. You do not have to answer every question. "I don't know. I'm here, and God is here" is a true answer.

Keep it short

- For someone who is sick or in pain, ten to fifteen minutes is usually plenty. Watch them, not the clock. Tired eyes mean it is time to pray and go.
- Stay longer when the family is waiting on news, when someone is dying, or when they ask you to.
- Speak to the person in the bed, not about them. Assume they can hear you even if they cannot answer.
- Notice the family in the room and in the hallway. They often need you as much as the patient does.

Stay in your lane

- Do not give medical opinions. Do not second-guess the doctors, the treatment or the family's choices.
- Do not read the monitors, touch the equipment or move the patient.
- When a doctor or nurse comes in, offer to step out.
- Do not promise an outcome. You can promise that God is with them and that you will be too.
- Ask before you touch. "Can I hold your hand while we pray?"
- Ask before you tell anyone. "Who would you like to know about this?"

Before you leave the room

- Read a short passage (Resource 4).
- Pray a short prayer out loud, by name.
- Tell them what happens next: when you will check in, and who they can call.
- Ask the family one practical question: "What do you need in the next two days?"
- Leave your card.

What to Say and Pray

What people need in grief

I wrote this about Psalm 61:1-3:

"In times of grief and loss it can feel like our foundation has left us. What we thought we could count on is no longer available to us and we feel isolated and alone. This phrase 'lead me to a rock that is high above me' reminds me of three great needs I need in grief, a friend to walk with, a solid foundation to stand on, and a higher perspective on the situation. I need protection, I need direction, I need to know I'm not alone!"

Use those three needs as your plan for the visit.

- **A friend to walk with.** That is you, in the room.
- **A solid foundation to stand on.** That is the passage you read.
- **A higher perspective.** That is the prayer, and it comes last. Do not rush to it.

Grieve, feel, hope

"I prayed over this statement and felt like the Lord was telling me to grieve the past, feel the weight of the present, and look to the hope in the future."

"He wants to walk with you, He desires to comfort you, He loves you so much."

That is a good order for a hard conversation. Let them grieve what is lost. Let the weight of today be heavy. Then speak of hope. Hope spoken too early sounds like you did not hear them.

Things to say

- "I'm so sorry."
- "I'm here."
- "You don't have to say anything."
- "This is hard. It makes sense that you feel this way."
- "I don't have an answer for that. I'm not going anywhere."
- "Tell me about him." (after a death)
- "Can I read you something short and pray?"

Things not to say

- "I know how you feel."
- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "God needed another angel."
- "At least..." followed by anything.
- "Be strong."
- "You should..." about treatment, the funeral or how they grieve.
- Your own hospital story.
- Any explanation of why God allowed this.

Passages to read

Read from your own Bible. Pick one. Read it slowly. Do not preach it.

When	Passage
Fear before surgery or a diagnosis	Psalms 23; Psalm 46:1-3; Isaiah 41:10
A long illness, worn down	Psalms 61:1-3; Matthew 11:28-30
Grief and loss	Lamentations 3:22-24; Psalm 34:18; John 11:32-36
Near death, for a believer	John 14:1-3; Romans 8:38-39; Revelation 21:3-4
For the family who is carrying it	Galatians 6:2; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Romans 12:15
When there are no words	Romans 8:26-27; Psalm 13

How to pray in the room

- Ask first: "What would you like me to pray for?" Then pray for that.
- Keep it under a minute for someone who is sick.
- Use their name. Use the names of the family in the room.
- Pray for the doctors and nurses.
- Ask God plainly for healing, comfort and peace. Leave the outcome with him. Do not promise what God has not promised.
- Do not use the prayer to say something to the family you would not say to their faces.

A simple shape for a bedside prayer

Write your own words into this shape before you need them.

1. **Who God is.** One sentence. He is near. He is faithful.
2. **Who is in the bed.** Name them. Say what they are facing in plain words.
3. **What you are asking.** Healing, relief from pain, wisdom for the doctors, peace for the family.
4. **Trust.** Place them in God's hands.
5. **In Jesus' name. Amen.**

When someone wants to give their life to Jesus

This will happen. A person facing death, or a family member in the hallway, asks you how to be right with God. Do not push it and do not miss it. Ask a plain question: "Have you ever put your faith in Jesus?" Then listen.

"The Bible tells us that we've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. That's true of me, it's true of you, and it's why Jesus came. He lived the perfect life we could never live, died the death we deserved, and rose again so that anyone who places their faith in Him can be forgiven, made new, and welcomed into God's family."

"The words don't save you. Jesus does."

"It's not the prayer that saves you, but your faith, making Jesus **Lord** of your life. We don't let anyone go on the journey alone."

Prayer of Salvation

Jesus, I acknowledge that I need you
I confess that I have sinned against you
I believe that God raised you from the dead
And right now, by faith, I say "Jesus is Lord"
Thank you for forgiving me
By your grace I am saved
And by your power I am set free

- Pray it one line at a time and let them repeat it, or pray it with them if they cannot speak.
- Make sure it is their own decision. A person who is heavily medicated or pressed by family is not in a place to be pushed.
- Tell a family member, with the person's permission, so someone follows up.

The Hardest Visits

When someone is dying

- Go as soon as you are called. This is the visit you do not put off.
- Speak to the dying person by name, even if they do not respond. Tell them who is in the room.
- Read a short passage from the "near death" row in Resource 4. Pray.
- Give the family room to say what they need to say. You can help by asking, "Is there anything you want to tell her?"
- Do not explain what is happening medically. Let the staff do that.
- Ask the family if they want you to stay or come back. Either answer is fine.
- If the person dies while you are there, stay. Pray with the family. Do not hurry them out of the room.
- Before you leave, find out who is with the family tonight.

When the loss is sudden

An accident, a death no one saw coming, a stillbirth or miscarriage, a death by suicide.

- Go to them. A hospital waiting room, a front porch, a kitchen. Ask where they are and go there.
- Say very little. "I'm so sorry. I'm here."
- Do not explain it. Do not defend God. Do not guess at why.
- Expect shock. People may be numb, angry, or oddly calm. All of it is normal grief. None of it needs correcting.
- Help with the next two hours, not the next two weeks. Who needs to be called. Who is picking up the children. Who is staying tonight.
- Do not raise the funeral unless they do. When they do, the Funeral Ministry Starter Kit on this site covers it.
- When a child has died, or a baby has been lost, use the child's name if the parents have given one.
- After a death by suicide, the family carries questions and often shame. Stay close. Do not speculate about why and do not pass on details to anyone. Point the family to a grief counselor who works with this kind of loss.

When someone may be in danger

You are a pastor. You are not a crisis professional, and this is not the place to act like one. Your job is to stay with the person, bring in the right help, and not carry it alone.

If someone may harm themselves or someone else

- Take it seriously every time. Do not decide on your own that they do not mean it.
- If there is immediate danger, call 911.
- In the United States, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached by calling or texting 988. Call with the person if they are willing.
- Do not leave them alone until help has arrived or someone responsible is with them.
- Do not promise to keep it secret. Say, "I care about you too much to keep this to myself."
- Pray with them. Prayer is not a substitute for getting help.

If you learn that a child, an elderly person or a dependent adult is being abused or neglected

- Know before you need it whether your state makes clergy mandatory reporters, what the deadline is, and who you report to. The law differs from state to state. Ask an attorney and your insurer, and write the answer down.
- Report to the authorities. Do not investigate it yourself. Do not confront the accused person first.
- Do not promise a child or a victim that you will keep it secret.
- Follow your church's written policy. If you do not have one, writing it is this month's job.

If an adult tells you their spouse or partner is hurting them

- Believe them. Their safety comes first.
- If there is immediate danger, call 911.
- Do not bring the couple together to talk it through. Do not tell the other person what you were told.
- Connect them with a local domestic violence agency. Have that number on your list before you need it.

Know before you need it

Fill this in on a calm day. Keep it in your phone and in the church office.

What	Your answer
Emergency	911
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (United States)	988
Your county's mental health crisis line	
Your state's child abuse reporting line	
Your state's adult protective services line	

What	Your answer
A local domestic violence agency	
Two licensed Christian counselors you trust	
A grief counselor or grief group	
Chaplain's office at each local hospital	
Your church's attorney	
Your church's insurance carrier	
Is clergy a mandatory reporter in your state, and by when?	
Where your church's written reporting policy is kept	

When to refer

- When what the person needs is treatment, not a visit. Depression that does not lift, addiction, trauma, thoughts of self-harm.
- When you are out of your depth. Say so plainly: "This is more than I am trained for. I want to help you find someone who is, and I am staying in your corner."
- Referring is not handing someone off. Keep showing up as their pastor.

Afterward, and Caring for Yourself

The same day

- Write down what you promised and when. Then do it.
- Tell only the people the family said you could tell.
- Pass on the practical needs: meals, rides, childcare, a visit from their small group.
- If anything in Resource 5 came up, make the call today. Do not sleep on it.

What the church does next

"People celebrate with you when life is good, and they show up when life falls apart."

"They would hear about the scandals, but not the hospital room where church members stayed long after visiting hours because they refused to let a family suffer alone."

The pastor's visit is one hour. The church's care is the weeks after it. Decide ahead of time:

- Who organizes meals, and for how long.
- Who the family's one point of contact is, so ten people are not texting them the same question.
- Whether their small group takes the lead on care.
- How a financial need gets handled, and who decides.

The year after

Most support stops about two weeks after a funeral. Grief does not. Keep following up for one year.

- Put follow-up dates on your calendar the day of the loss: one week, one month, three months, six months, one year.
- Remember the hard days: the birthday, the anniversary, the first holidays.
- A text that says "I'm thinking of you today" is enough. It does not need a reply.
- Say the name of the person who died. Families are afraid everyone else has forgotten.
- Decide ahead of time who makes these contacts when it is not you.

When they come back to church

"Someone may walk through these doors carrying grief."

"Someone may simply need another believer to notice them."

"We don't know every story in the room, but God does."

Tell your greeters and leaders, with the family's permission, so someone is looking for them on the first Sunday back.

Caring for yourself

"You're trying to pour into others without first letting God pour into you."

"Take a pause, slow down, journal, and cry out to God."

You walked into that room as a pastor. You walked out as a person who just saw something hard. Both are true.

- After a hard visit, do not go straight to the next thing. Sit in the car for five minutes. Pray. Breathe.
- Tell one trusted person that it was a hard day. You can do that without sharing anything private.
- Decide ahead of time who that person is. A pastor friend, a mentor, an elder.
- Let yourself grieve. You lose people too.
- Keep your day off the week after a death or a crisis. Move it if you have to. Do not skip it.
- Read Mark 6:30-32 and 1 Kings 19:3-8. Rest and food came before the next assignment.
- If you are not sleeping, you dread your phone, or you feel nothing in rooms where you used to feel a lot, talk to a counselor or your doctor. That is not weakness. That is what you would tell anyone in your church.

You are not the only one

"Someone will bring a meal to a family that's overwhelmed. Someone will sit quietly beside a hospital bed. Someone will pray with a friend who's ready to give up. Someone will invite a neighbor to church. Someone will share the hope of Jesus. That's the Church."

Train others to do this with you. Take a leader along on the next ordinary hospital visit and talk it through in the car afterward. A church where only the pastor visits will wear out its pastor.