

The Ministry of Hospital Visitation

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A shepherd must care for the sick, wounded, and dying sheep. Hospitals, diseases, infirmities, death, and pain all are the “first order of things” which shall have no part whatsoever in the glorious inheritance of the believer in heaven. But for now, trekking through this life to the glory of God and still battling the effects of sin in myriads of ways, the ministry of hospital visitation is very important in the life and culture of a church. Indeed, “If one member suffers, then all the members suffer with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

To aid in how to properly visit someone in the hospital, a number of important elements can be highlighted.

1. Point the sick person to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The most important reality in the entire world is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is no less the case when visiting someone in the hospital! Those that are sick, wounded, recovering, dying, or grieving must remember Jesus Christ and His glorious gospel. The goal of a hospital visitation is to point the patient to the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ!

2. Direct the sick person to the unchanging character of God.

Inquiring about the illness is helpful and understanding more of the circumstances can be of assistance, but during the visit, the main goal and the focused direction of the conversation should center on the unchanging character of God. For someone in the hospital, he hopes something will change (an illness for the better, a wound will be healed, a cancer will be eradicated, etc.) but there must be an intentional call to focus upon, rest in, rejoice in, and have confidence in the unchanging character of God.

3. Keep the visitation simple, short, yet full of warmth and biblical truth.

Rather than making a hospital visit tedious, burdensome, and tiresome to both the patient and the one who is visiting, hospital visits are best if they are kept short, brief, and full of biblical truth. Hospital visits should not linger, drag, or be boring. Neither should hospital visits have lingering conversations of no eternal value. The goal is to be simple, short, brief, and all the while full of warmth and biblical truth. The Scriptures give hope, perseverance, encouragement, grace, and a heavenward perspective. This needs to be a reality.

4. Pray with the patient and proclaim the gospel in the prayer and beg for God's grace to give strength to endure for His glory.

Nothing is more needed and appropriate during a hospital visit than coming before the throne of God's grace in earnest prayer. Prayers should remain God-centered rather than man-centered. God's glory is the goal not always human comforts. The spread of the gospel is key rather than temporal health. The goal during the time of prayer is to direct the heart, mind, and affections of the patient (and the family members/friends present) to the gospel as it is spoken, clarified, and exalted during the prayer.

5. Remember that visiting the sick, hurting and wounded in a shepherd's flock should be a priority.

God indicts false shepherds in Ezekiel 34:4 for not strengthening sick sheep. God is one who strengthens, empowers, aids, and carries His sheep. Believers should care for one another, hurt with one another, encourage one another, and point one another to Christ, His gospel, and the hope of heaven regardless of the trial, the illness, the grief, or the tragedy. Remembering these truths can give joy to hospital visitations.