



mount hope church

# CARE RESOURCE GUIDE

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Life Group Leaders



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# INTRODUCTION

Believers are meant to walk in a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father and with each other, (Mark 12:30-31; 1 John. 3:1). Since the dawn of the first church, the earliest disciples devoted themselves to creating communities that reflect God's love by caring for one another.

In the book of Acts we see that the outcome of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that,

*“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.” (Acts 2:42-43 NLT)*

We are designed to thrive in community, thus the vital purpose for Life Groups and our aim to create genuine care for one another.

This Life Group Care Guide is here to help you meet the needs of those in your Life Group, no matter what season of life they are in. In this guide, you will find:

- Helpful things to say (and avoid saying)
- Practical ways to show love in different situations and seasons
- When pastoral involvement might be beneficial
- Related and relevant Bible passages to read together and pray together

A profound love comes from a community who can trust and care for one another well. Don't miss the opportunity to discover the joy of partnering with Jesus and making a big difference in someone's life. The Apostle Paul writes:

*“Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!” (Romans 12:9-16)*

# CARE IN MOMENTS OF JOY

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice...” (Romans 12:15)*

There are special moments in life that are cause for celebration. You have an opportunity to show love in those moments, making a huge mark in the lives of your Life Group members. Moments like:

## BIRTH OF A CHILD

*“Behold, children are a gift of the LORD.” (Psalm 127:3)*

### Practical Ways To Care

One of the great joys in life is the birth of a child. As a Life Group, we have the opportunity to demonstrate love and care as they celebrate this major event in their life. Here are a few ideas:

- Organize a meal train for meals for the family while the mother is recovering and focused on the new baby. See Appendix for a simple online tool to help create a meal train.
- Visit them in the hospital
- Offer to care for the older children for the first few days mom is in the hospital, or at home with the new baby
- Go in on a gift together
- Host a baby shower
- Host a diaper party for the new dad

## HOUSE MOVE

*“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established...” (Proverbs 24:3)*

### Practical Ways To Care

Preparing to move from one home to another is very exciting. However, it can be very challenging if you don't have much help. As a Life Group, you can be the extra strength and support, showing love and care in practical ways. Here's a few ideas:

- Gather boxes, moving blankets, and moving vehicle options.
- Offer to help pack boxes
- As a Life Group, offer to help out on moving day
- Organize the Life Group to provide lunch on the moving day for everyone who is helping in the move
- Offer to care for children on moving day
- Gather together and pray a blessing over their new home and their new neighborhood

## PREPARING TO GET MARRIED

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)*

## Practical Ways To Care

A couple's wedding ceremony is one of the most joyous and wonderful days of their lives. The season leading up to that day can be a lot of planning and hectic at times. As a Life Group, you can help make the engagement season, as well as the big day, less cumbersome. Here are a few ideas:

- Plan a shower for the couple or the bride
- Pray for them each week, and especially as their wedding day approaches
- Attend the wedding as a group
- Go in together on a wedding gift for one of their bigger presents.

## CARE IN TOUGH TIMES

*“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble” (Psalm 46:1).*

We all face difficulties in life. The Bible tells us that we will have trials of many kinds, but we are not to fear and be dismayed. God is our strength and a very present help in times of trouble. God wants to be the one to whom we run to and to be our source of strength and comfort. Your Life Group's primary role is to support one another and be a spiritual family in difficult times.

Difficult times can include, but are not limited to, the following situations:

- Illness
- A death of a family member
- Marriage trouble or divorce
- The loss of a job or a home
- A serious accident

Here are some practical ways that we can care for one another during these difficult times:

- Pray with them and for them!
- Spend time with them so they know they are not alone as they go through this difficult situation. Presence can speak louder than words in difficult times.
- Send a note in the mail to the individual as a way of encouragement and strength. Include encouraging and life giving Scriptures that are appropriate.
- Connect with them by phone to let them know you, as an individual, are there for them.
- Provide some meals to the family, if applicable. (See page 16)
- Be aware of other practical ways the Life Group could help (like running errands, driving them to a doctor's appointment, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, or providing childcare).
- Attend the funeral, if a loved one has passed away. Your presence matters more than your words.
- Invite them over for dinner or coffee or go on a walk together so they know you have not forgotten about them and their loss.

## DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).*

When a Life Group member experiences the death of someone close to them, it is time to show that we care for them and want to support them throughout their grief process.

When someone loses a parent, a child, or a sibling to whom they are closely connected, please let a staff pastor know. That will allow the church to express condolences appropriately the next time they see each other.

As a Life Group, please surround the member as it is appropriate, each member of the group taking turns being with the Life Group member. Be sensitive to the survivors’ needs. Your presence matters. It’s incredibly difficult to feel alone at such a vulnerable time.

Here’s how you can best communicate and express love to any member of your community in these difficult times:

### If A Spouse Passes Away

*Things you can say:*

- Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Your presence and your genuine tears can say more than your words.
- “My heart is with you. I’m praying for you.” This is better than simply saying, “I’m so sorry.” Recognizing the terrible loss helps validate and share in the person’s grief.
- “I’m here for you. Can I call you in a few days?” Grieving people may have trouble asking for help, so it is helpful to take responsibility for contact and follow through.
- “May we bring you a meal Tuesday?” or “We would like to rake the leaves in your yard Saturday, is that okay with you?” Instead of, “If there’s anything I can do, just ask.” Again, grieving people will have trouble asking for help. So make suggestions. Anything you can remove from their chore list will give them time and see that they are not alone.

*Things to avoid saying:*

- “Your spouse is in heaven.” Even if this is true, it doesn’t minimize the loss that the surviving spouse is going through.
- “Maybe we should have prayed harder.” You never want to make them feel responsible for the death.
- “Don’t worry, God has a new mate for you.” This statement invalidates the need to mourn the loss of a loved one, and implies the person should find comfort in hoping for a replacement spouse.

### If A Child Passes Away

*Things you can say:*

- Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Your presence and your genuine tears can say more than your words.
- *“I’m praying for you. My heart goes out to you.”*



- *“I care about you and am praying for you.”*
- *“I don’t know what to say. But please know that I’m here for you. We are here to walk through this with you.”*
- After an appropriate length of time you may want to ask, *“How is your marriage doing?”* Losing a child can be very difficult on a marriage, so make sure you are checking in with them, and if need be, refer them to a pastor or other qualified professional.

*Things to avoid saying:*

- *“God wanted your child with Him.”* This statement makes the parents feel as if God is cruel or angry with them and is punishing them.
- *“Well, at least you have your other children.”*
- *“Everything happens for a reason; God will work this out for good.”*
- *“If only you had more faith or had prayed harder...”*

**When To Encourage An Individual To Meet With A Pastor or Qualified Professional**

- The person has stopped eating or drinking
- When the grief paralyzes the rest of life and prevents the person from caring for themselves, sustaining a job, or taking care of their other children
- When the person becomes withdrawn or reclusive
- When the person doesn’t leave the home for an abnormal period of time
- When the person expresses suicidal thoughts or shows signs of suicidal intent.
- When the grief never seems to end, and after a natural period of grief the person makes extreme efforts to keep his/her loved one alive.

**ADDICTION**

*“...He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1).*

There are times where an individual may struggle with an addiction or a repetitive pattern of sin. We can be assured that Jesus came to set them free, and to give them life abundantly! As a Life Group, you can support the individual by praying for them and encouraging them to attend a Celebrate Recovery nearby.

There may be times that a pastor or other health professionals need to be involved, or the person may need to attend a medically supervised withdrawal management program/detox center.

Here’s what you can do to help them find freedom from their addiction:

*Things to say:*

- *“It is ok to feel powerless by yourself. But with Jesus, freedom is at hand.”*
- *“You’re not alone. I’m here with you, and so is God.”* Addiction is often associated with shame, making it difficult to publicly acknowledge.

### *Things to avoid saying:*

- “I don’t know anyone else in the church struggling with this issue.” Sometimes it can seem as if they are the only ones struggling with the issue because people have not had the opportunity to share their struggle in a secure environment.
- “If you really wanted to, you would just stop.” It is not your position to judge that person, but instead to point them towards Jesus. Let God handle the conviction and you do the loving.

### **When to Encourage a Person to Meet With a Pastor or Other Health Professional**

- The person asks for a referral.
- The addiction has become dangerous.
- The addiction significantly impairs relationships with others and with God.
- The person begins to experience depression or anxiety after stopping the addictive behavior.

## **MARRIAGE STRUGGLES**

*“Love is not self-seeking, it’s not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong” (1 Corinthians 13:5)*

Marriages take work and we all face challenges at times. It is important to rally around couples and not take sides in those moments. We believe marriages can thrive and survive the difficult times. We provide great resources to help build and strengthen marriages so they will be strong and life-giving.

- Life Groups for Married Couples – A great way to strengthen a marriage is to encourage couples to attend a marriage focused Life Group. Please refer to the Life Group locator on our website for topics, dates, and times they meet.
- Marriage Mentoring – This is one of our most highly recommended resources for couples that want to see their marriage be all the God has for them. It is a mentoring ministry where the couple in need would meet with a trained mentor couple to effectively determine the areas of struggle and then work at developing solutions to the challenges they face. To get connected to this ministry, please email [hope@mounthopechurch.org](mailto:hope@mounthopechurch.org).
- Amazing Love Marriage Conference—Mount Hope Church invests in local couples and families by hosting a conference to encourage and coach married couples and families.
- Crisis Counseling—Mount Hope Church offers three levels of ministry for inner healing—all designed to set people free to love like Jesus Christ. We offer SOZO, Biblical Guidance (4 sessions), and referrals to Christian counseling partners.

### **How To Help A Couple Struggling In Their Marriage**

- Give them hope! Show them places in the scripture where it talks about God’s hope for restored and reconciled relationships. These scripture references can be found in the Appendix in this guide.
- Let them know that many couples experience rough roads but that getting some outside help is the best next step.
- Be an encourager of the relationship rather than taking sides. Be FOR the marriage and hold them both equally accountable for working on the relationship.

Encourage them to meet with a staff pastor or contact [hope@mounthopechurch.org](mailto:hope@mounthopechurch.org) to arrange to meet with a marriage mentoring couple.

## **DIVORCE**

When a couple is wrestling with the future of their marriage, we must use wisdom. It is not our choice—it rests solely between the couple and God. Whether or not we agree with the decision, we are exhorted to love one another.

When a decision to divorce is made, we want to support either individual who wants to move on in their relationship with God. We want to include them, pray for them, and be there for them. However we strongly recommend that someone of the same gender provide the support and encouragement.

*Things you can say:*

- *“We will be praying for you.”* Show the love of Jesus.
- *“Please join us.”* After divorce, many people have trouble adjusting to the single life. Sadly, sometimes, divorced people are left out of social situations because they are divorced. Make an effort to include them in activities. If they express being uncomfortable with other couples, assure them that they are welcome and that the group would love to have them involved in activities.
- *“We live in a broken world—and that affects everything—even marriage.”* It can be helpful to acknowledge that the brokenness, sinfulness, and grief we experience on this earth are far from God’s ideal for us. But in the midst of every situation, He will provide comfort and will lead them into a healthy and hope-filled future.

*Things to avoid saying:*

- *“It’s not your fault.”* Don’t discourage their acceptance of personal responsibility; eventually, part of the healing process comes from acknowledging their responsibility, receiving forgiveness from God, forgiving their spouse, and allowing God to work in their heart.
- *“I’m on your side.”* Do not take sides in any divorce. Refuse to feed bitterness or resentment in either person toward the other individual. That is destructive behavior and will only delay healing. Instead, promote redemption forgiveness and peace as much as depends on them. Do what you can to encourage both individuals to stay connected to God, church, and a Life Group.

### **When To Encourage The Person To Meet with a Staff Pastor or Health Professional**

- When an individual references self-destructive or suicidal thoughts or feelings
- If either individual shows a lengthy pattern of isolating themselves from other people
- When an individual misses work repeatedly or is unable to consistently perform their daily activities.

### **Resources**

- *“Choosing Wisely Before You Divorce”*—A five week long, highly-effective curriculum where a hurting couple meets with a trained mentor couple to review all aspects of divorce before making a decision about their marriage

## TERMINAL ILLNESS

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)*

When a person receives a diagnosis from their doctor that they have a terminal illness, it feels like the world is crashing in. The shock, the medical decisions, and the unknown are some of the things that an individual or family may face. A caring and loving Life Group can be incredibly meaningful to the individual in times of challenge and difficulty.

Please inform the Connections Pastor immediately if a Life Group member receives a diagnosis of a terminal illness. Of course, respect any request for confidentiality.

### *Things to Say or Do:*

- Privately, request the rest of the Life Group to pray (and even fast), asking God to do a miracle and heal the individual with the terminal illness. *“All things are possible for the one who believes” (Mark 9:23)*
- Offer specific practical help (e.g. *“May we bring you a meal Tues?”* or *“We would like to rake the leaves in your yard Saturday, is that okay with you?”* Rather than *“If there’s anything I can do, just ask.”*)
- *“It’s ok to be angry.”* God desires open dialogue— encourage your friend to let out their true emotions with you and God.
- Keep them focused on God’s faithfulness—God is not the Author of sickness and disease. He is there with them in the midst of their struggle. He is the Way through every challenge they will face. He is faithful. *“We’ll see you later when we come back to visit again.”* It’s important for your friend to know you won’t abandon them when times get tough—they will be encouraged knowing that they can look forward to future times together.
- Try to fit your Life Group around their schedule—if it is possible for them to actively participate, create normalcy by moving the meeting to wherever they are. If they cannot meet, phone them during your Life Group to let them know you are praying for them.
- Encourage them to consult their physicians about any changes in medications rather than making decisions on their own in difficult moments.
- If they want a visit from a pastor, please ask them to contact the Care Pastor of Mount Hope Church or one of the staff pastors with whom they have relationship.

### *Things to Avoid Saying or Doing:*

- *“All things work for good through God’s plans.”* Though this is true, it may come across wrong to someone going through a terminal illness. They may get the false impression that God wants them to die, when in fact John 10:10 says, *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”*
- *“Just believe more, and you won’t be angry/will be healed.”* This statement causes guilt and inadequacy.

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)*

We know at times that either through unforeseen circumstances such as a job loss, medical costs, etc. or bad financial decisions, individuals or families may find themselves struggling to make ends meet. In order to address a variety of situations with regard to financial assistance, Mount Hope Church leadership has established guidelines that are outlined below to provide assistance to an individual or family.

### **Things To Say Or Do**

- Pray with them.
- In some situations, if the need is small, you may want to consider how your group can assist the need before turning to the church’s Benevolence Fund. We do not expect a Life Group to support an individual in financial difficulties to a significant degree.
- Encourage the individual or family to apply for Benevolence. The individual can pick up a Benevolence Application form from the church main office, located at 202 S. Creyts Road, Lansing, MI.
- You also may want to encourage them to attend the “Managing Your Family Finances” class. This is an excellent class to help them with their financial situation.

### **Things To Avoid Saying Or Doing**

- Never make any promises, on behalf of yourself or the church, for financial assistance.

## **HOSPITAL VISITATION CARE TIPS**

*“I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:36).*

### **Group Support**

- Be sensitive about the timing of your visit. Call the patient or a close family member to determine when is the best time to visit.
- If possible, have one member of the Life Group set up the meetings with the patient so that there is a consistent visitation schedule.

### **Please...**

- Knock before entering a room. Observe signs, notices, and precautions on patient’s door.

- If possible, sit where you can maintain comfortable eye contact with the patient.
- Be cheerful and make pleasant conversation.
- Shape the tone and substance of your conversation from cues offered by the patient.
- Listen attentively by giving the patient your undivided attention.
- Let patient know he/she can talk about sensitive subjects.
- Excuse yourself when the doctor enters the room unless requested to stay.
- Share scripture and ask the patient if they have special needs as you prepare to pray (see below for suggested scriptures).
- Inform the Mount Hope Church Care Ministry of your visit, if possible.

**Please don't...**

- Be insulted by patient's words/attitudes or register shock at a patient's appearance.
- Offer false optimism or participate in criticism about the doctor or the treatment.
- Touch the equipment or sit on the patient's bed.
- Tell the patient unpleasant news—including your own troubles.
- Whisper or talk about the patient's condition with family members in the room. Step outside, if necessary when talking to family members or medical staff.
- Break hospital rules or violate confidentiality issues.
- Awaken the patient unless a nurse gives approval.
- Help the patient get out of bed or give food or drink without a nurse's approval.

**SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

- Psalm 23; 34; 46; 61; 62; 63; 103; 116; 121; 139
- Mark 2:3-5

**RESPONSIBILITY**

It's very important that as we care for people we understand the difference between being responsible "FOR" versus responsible "TO". We are NOT responsible to fix or parent adults. Christians can get confused when we equate being responsible FOR others with being responsible TO others.

**Responsible for vs. Responsible to**

*Listening for Heaven's Sake* by Dr. Gary Sweeten, David Ping & Anne Clippard

WHEN I FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHERS	WHEN I FEEL RESPONSIBLE TO OTHERS
<p><i>I...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix</li> <li>• Protect</li> <li>• Rescue</li> <li>• Control</li> <li>• Carry their feelings</li> <li>• Don't listen</li> </ul> <p><i>I feel...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tired</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Fearful</li> <li>• Liable</li> </ul> <p><i>I am concerned with...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The solution</li> <li>• Details</li> <li>• Answers</li> <li>• Circumstances</li> <li>• Being right</li> <li>• Performance</li> </ul>	<p><i>I...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show empathy</li> <li>• Encourage</li> <li>• Share</li> <li>• Confront</li> <li>• Am sensitive</li> <li>• Listen</li> </ul> <p><i>I feel...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaxed</li> <li>• Free</li> <li>• Aware</li> <li>• High self-worth</li> </ul> <p><i>I am concerned with...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relating person-to-person as an equal to others</li> <li>• Listening to feelings and thoughts</li> <li>• Respecting the person</li> </ul>

# APPENDIX

## Meal Train

When it comes to providing meals for someone in your Life Group in times of need, it would be wonderful if the members within a Life Group could provide support. This is what a loving community is all about.

To organize a meal train, we recommend [mealtrain.com](http://mealtrain.com). This site allows you to create a calendar that group members can log into and sign up for a particular day.

To use the [mealtrain.com](http://mealtrain.com), you will need to gather the following information about the family you are providing care for BEFORE setting up the calendar:

1. E-mail address of the individual receiving the meals
2. Address and phone number of the individual receiving the meals
3. What dates do meals need to be delivered, and how many will be eating
4. Enter likes, dislikes, and what time of day they would like to receive meals (please ask for a window of time)
5. Whether they would prefer “ready to eat” meals or frozen meals that they can prepare at their convenience
6. Does anyone in the household have food allergies

*To start using mealtrain.com:*

- Go to [mealtrain.com](http://mealtrain.com) and click the green “Start Your Meal Train” button in the middle of the page, and follow the simple directions.

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

### Death Of A Child Or Spouse

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)*

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:16)*

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:22-26)*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Co. 1:3-4)*

### Marriage Struggles

*In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understand-*



*ing as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)*

*For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's Word. (Ephesians 5:22-26)*

## **Terminal Illness**

*We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone. (Psalm 33:20-22)*

*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29)*

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Death Of A Child**

- Book: "Surviving the Loss of a Child: Support for Grieving Parents" – Elizabeth Brown
- Book: "It's Okay to Cry: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Through the Losses of Life" – H. Norman Wright

### **Death Of A Spouse**

- Book: "Grief and Mourning" – Dave Williams
- Book: "From One Widow to Another" – Miriam Neff
- Book: "Reflections of a Grieving Spouse: The Unexpected Journey from Loss to Renewed Hope" – H. Norman Wright
- Book: "Good Grief" – Granger E. Westberg
- Support Group: Join our GriefShare group, or one in the area: <http://www.griefshare.org/>

### **Marriage Struggles**

- Book: "The Five Love Needs" – Dr. Gary Rosberg
- Book: "When Life Hurts" – Jimmy Evans

### **Divorce**

- Book: "When I Do becomes I Don't: Practical Steps During Separation and Divorce" – Laura Petherbridge
- Book: "Growing Through Divorce" – Jim Smoke

### **Terminal Illness**

- Book: "Christ the Healer" – F. Bosworth
- Book: "Still Standing: Hope and Encouragement in the Face of Serious Illness" – Pamela Burton