



Ministering to the terminally ill

Have you ever found yourself at a loss for words when you've heard that a friend or relative is dying, and the person is not a follower of Christ? You know that Christ is their only hope for eternity, but they may not feel the same way.

Most believers really want to minister to such people, but do not know what would be the right thing to do or say. Churches seldom teach their members how to minister to unbelievers, especially those who are terminally ill.

The fact that God can and wants to heal the sick is without question. In this article, however, the focus will be on how to practically reach out to an unsaved person who has been informed that nothing more can be done for them medically.

What you need to know

1. People want to know God

Although it may not seem like it outwardly, the moment someone learns they are terminally ill, their thinking changes. You can pay such a person a visit and start by just asking them to tell you what happened. Allow them to tell their story. Ask them questions. Be sincerely interested in their journey, their questions, their regrets, the things they still want to do before they pass. Allow them to talk.

Continuously ask the Holy Spirit to show you a way in which you can relate to one of their experiences in life – an experience you can use to share what happened to you in similar circumstances. And then you tell them how the Lord Jesus helped you through that time.

Often when we acknowledge the questions a person has, it opens the door for a straightforward conversation with them about Christ. It might not be at the first visit, they may be too tired or troubled. So, listen to the Holy Spirit to show you when they are ready for you to share openly.

Do not force them to take immediate decisions. Give them time to contemplate and think about what you have said. Visit them again later during the day or the next day.

2. People want to know if there really is life beyond the grave

One of the most important things a terminally ill patient wants to know for certain, is that there is life after death. You can tell them how a seed or flower bulb has to be buried in the ground before beauty can come from it. In the same way, our natural bodies are decaying, but in each of us there is a spiritual body that will live eternally.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is*

raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. Do not be shy to read these Scriptures to them— they are powerful and cut to the heart more than any of our own words can ever do.

The impact of the knowledge that your life is coming to an end, is hyper-traumatic to say the least. Those without the Lord Jesus may wonder whether what you share is true or not. Just keep praying for them. Keep on sharing the truth of Christ day after day, as long as you have the opportunity. Share Christ as hope amidst death's brutality.

3. Life and death questions

Everyone wants to know what will happen to them when they die. Or how to escape death. Once they are ready to ask questions about life and death, listen attentively. Answer as well as you can. Be honest from your own point of view. You can say something like, "I do not know where you stand, but the one thing that has brought me true peace and calm was when I acknowledged that I needed God". And then, because your approach was not offensive, you may have opportunity to share openly. And then allow them to respond to what you just shared.

Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you all the way. Have some Scripture verses ready that you can read to them – the hearing of the Word cuts to the heart by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The word 'gospel' means news. It is the news about who Jesus Christ is, what He has done and how that changes everything for all of us. (Scriptures: Isaiah 53:5; Mark 10:45; John 3:16; Acts 10:43, 13:38-39, Romans 4:25, 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; 2 Timothy 2:8; Titus 2:14, 3:4-7; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18; 1 John 4:10).

4. When they are unconscious

What if they are unconscious when you first arrive? It is well known that people are aware of their surroundings when in a coma or unconscious. You can sit at their bedside and speak to them openly about Christ. Do not waste time – speak openly and boldly. Pray for them in their hearing. Read Scriptures to them out loud. And then ask them to press your hand or move their eyelids if they agree with you. Keep on praying and ministering to them for as long as it is possible. Even if they do not respond, they are still attentive – continue to do this in faith.

To summarise

1. Listen to their story.
2. Read Scriptures and quote what the Bible says.
3. Speak comfort and hope to them.
4. Ask what you can do for them practically – serve them. This is part of your testimony.
5. Talk about heaven – tell stories of heaven, what you have read in Scripture and heard from the testimonies of others.
6. Be faithful in what you can do and trust the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do. Give thanks for every opportunity to minister to someone in such a situation.