

PART 2



NEEDS

The thrust of a Christian ministry to residents of nursing homes is a response to the personal needs that the elderly have at this time and place in their lives. In this part of the manual you will become better able to identify some of the common needs and concerns and better prepared to respond to them.

The first section has been written to help you identify and understand some of the typical needs and concerns that one finds among the elderly. In the chart that follows the descriptions, each need/concern is listed and related to their needs/concerns. The chart shows what biblical passages are relevant for the need/concern and suggested responses are given. The purpose of the chart is not to give the final word on each need/concern but to get you thinking about it and preparing yourself to respond to it.



IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND CONCERNS

Read through the short description of each need/concern below. Then, in order to put each one into focus and begin thinking about how to respond to it, consult the same need/concern on the chart that follows.

ANXIETY

Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

I Pet. 5:7

There are many potential causes of anxiety. What may seem trivial to one person can be a crisis to another. Remember this as you visit the elderly. Their worries may be in a totally different realm from yours, but that is no reason to dismiss their problems, or fail to understand how they feel. Listen as they explain their worries about finances, death, whether or not they will walk again, the future—whatever it may be. Try to feel with them.

We who are believers have a God who loves and cares for us more deeply than our friends, relatives or nurses can ever care for us. There is really no reason to worry about *anything* if we are trusting in God and loving Him. The unbeliever, however, has everything to worry about. To such a person you must point out that in spite of the good care they may be receiving from people they must trust Christ in order to have no worries. Do your best to find the root cause of the anxiety, and wherever possible help to change the circumstances that create the anxieties.

COMFORT

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matt. 5:4

While you yourself are not the ultimate source, you can be one of the greatest means of ministering comfort to the elderly. Whatever the cause of distress—death of a loved one, loneliness, fear—your consistent visitation and sympathy will be much appreciated. Let them lean on you but beware if they begin to develop an unhealthy attachment to you as their only source of comfort. A comfort that does not have its source in the unchanging and merciful God is only a temporary and unstable comfort. The comfort you are able to give is the comfort you have received (2 Cor. 1:3-11).

CONTENTMENT

...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Phil. 4:11

Much lack of contentment stems from fear and an excessive concern for one's self. Thus the major effort of the visitor should be to displace this concern. If the person to whom you are

ministering is merely distracted for a while by your presence, then the problem will not be solved. You must help the resident find another focus for his or her attention, a focus that will give lasting satisfaction. The only such focus is God. This is not to say, however, that there are not many practical things to be done. For example, if the person needs a friend, *your* friendship can be a great source of contentment.

DEATH

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

1 Cor. 15:55

The best way to prepare for death is to be so overwhelmingly involved with Jesus that you can hardly wait to meet Him face to face! You can help the elderly develop such a relationship in several ways: Make it a priority in *your* life to have such a close relationship with Christ. Share as clearly and as often as possible what Christ means to you. Comfort the elderly as they experience the death of friends and relatives. Use these occasions as opportunities to talk to them about their own death. Be aware of the grief that will invariably come with the dying process (cf. “Grief” below). And, finally, take time to deal with your own attitudes about death and share openly with them about your struggles in this area.

ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT

... I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. Phil. 3:8

You can help to ease the pain of those who are in financial and material need.

First, do something about the need—organize a clothing drive in your church, share what you can of your resources, solicit donations (for a pair of special shoes, for example). But be careful not to overwhelm your friends with charity so that you destroy their proper sense of self-worth. Second, stress the relative unimportance of material things in comparison with eternal things. We know a dear Christian who, on an allowance of four dollars a week, is constantly trying to give money away to us! Contentment with your physical state is possible when you know God is caring for your needs.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32

The first and most important thing to do is to find the basis of any fear. Whether it is real or imaginary, it needs to be dealt with. Then begin to help your elderly friend to focus on new thoughts and concerns (see “Thought Life” below). However, be careful not to divert attention off the fear too quickly; if the fear has not been “exercised,” it will likely return.

GRIEF

... that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

1 Thess. 4:13

It is helpful to see grief as occurring in three stages (see *The Christian Counselor's New Testament*, Jay Adams, 1977, pp. 730, 731). The first stage, or *crisis* stage, is characterized by surprise, shock and emotional release. This is the time to lend a listening ear. The second, or *crucial* stage, is one of disorganization. Ties to the past must be broken, and the future viewed realistically. The person may be feeling a whole range of emotions—fear, anger, guilt—and will need help in sorting through what has happened. The *construction* stage is a time for creating new patterns of living which are not tied to the past. A friend can be helpful in setting new objectives, especially a friend who can help make Christ the center of the new life.

HOPE

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col. 1:27

It is important to hear what a person is saying is the cause of the despair. Christ is indeed the answer to all our needs, but His name should not be lightly offered as a blanket remedy for all ills—especially those that we know nothing about because we haven't listened! Only after we know the problem can we *apply* Christ's hope to a specific situation.

LONELINESS

Do not cast me off in the time of old age, do not forsake me when my strength fails. Ps. 71:9

Encourage the residents to be outgoing in making friends with both staff and residents of the nursing home. Suggest they start with a smile, a kind word and a cheerful attitude—and work from there. Befriending others is one of the easiest ways to make friends. For those who are bedridden, encourage others in the home to visit them—even take a visitor with you when you visit! Remember, too, that *you* are a friend—don't visit sporadically, but give of yourself and your time to be a friend.

THE PAST

... forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Phil.3:13-14

Don't assume that all dwelling in the past is wrong. Perhaps there is anger, bitterness or guilt that needs to be discussed. Don't press too hard if the elderly aren't willing to talk about a problem; they are sometimes more reticent to discuss openly than we might be. Do urge taking these matters to God in prayer and if possible clearing things up with the people involved. Give them

things to do and think about in the present, too. Involvement with other people and their needs is a good way to become freed from too much introspection. Remember, too, that often the past is worthy of much enjoyable reflection and reconsideration.

PEACE

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you.
Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”*

John 14:27

As with contentment, God is really the only source of a lasting change, since He alone can give true peace. As you minister to older persons, stress what the individual can do about his or her relationships to others that will bring peace. There may be a need to forgive others, for example, or to deal with bitterness from the past. Encourage them to be examples of peace and so receive the gift of peace.

PHYSICAL DECAY

*Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner
man is being renewed day by day. 2 Cor. 4:16*

Gradual decay of the body is to be expected. Don't be repelled by the aging bodies you see—look to the unseen, the spiritual, the persons beneath the sometimes feeble bodies. Let them know you still care—especially by a loving touch of that body they may have come to dislike. Point them to the unseen too—encourage a close, personal relationship with Christ. This will help them to become more excited about the prospects of an eternal life with Christ—one in which there is no pain or death. Encourage a reliance on God as a source of strength—physical and otherwise—now.

SELF-ESTEEM

*See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called chil-
dren of God, and such we are ... 1 John 3:1*

It is most important that we focus on God's grace and power in our lives as the source of our self-esteem. Others will come to appreciate this if we give testimony to it in our selves. Encourage those to whom you are ministering to come to God in humility and accept His love for them *as they are*. As a visitor you are a great source of self-esteem as you show love and concern for individuals no matter what their physical, mental or spiritual state. There are, of course, various personality-building exercises that can build self-esteem—things that require stopping sinful practices (such as complaining and gossiping) and living a life of love. The external things should not, however, take the place of the need for a changed heart.

THOUGHT LIFE

*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things
that are on earth. Col. 3:2*

Where our desires and thoughts are focused is where we live. Our thoughts are crucial in how happy and fulfilled we are. The same is true for the elderly. If we deal only with outward behavior, then there will be no true change or healing. God and His attributes must be the center of thought and action.

TIME

Making the most of your time, because the days are evil. Eph. 5:16

The need for discipline in the use of time is crucial for the elderly who no longer have their former obligations, responsibilities and patterns of life. As a consequence, many older persons in nursing homes spend much of each day gazing at a television set or off into space. There are usually some activities in which the residents can be involved—craft programs, therapy, social events. As enjoyable and valuable as these activities are, they often lack the deep sense of meaning and purpose that the human heart craves. We all need to see that our time is not our own, and the elderly are no exception: time is a gift from God which is to be used to its fullest to His glory. Brainstorm with friends as to what the elderly can do that is meaningful and enjoyable, then approach the nursing home with suggestions. Everything—including prayer, knitting baby booties or visiting others in the home—counts.

NEEDS AND CONCERNS CHART

HOW TO USE THE CHART

For Personal Preparation

The chart that follows was composed in response to a need to deal specifically with problems encountered by individuals we have known in various nursing homes. The chart also has proved useful in the preparation of sermons for use in the homes. In connection with each major need/concern we have listed a number of related areas of concern so that you can be aware of the many varieties of needs and concerns that exist. We have offered scriptural references to help you ponder and address the many needs/concerns listed. We are convinced that one important way to understand the thoughts and feelings of the elderly is to spend time meditating on God's word.

Under each need/concern there are three columns of information:

Related Concerns: These are areas of concern related to the main topic of the chart. Since people respond to situations in different ways, we have tried to touch on some of this variety and to suggest both problems and solutions that you should be aware of.

Bible Study Materials: The passages listed in this section demonstrate sometimes positive and sometimes negative reactions; they may show man's response or God's response. They relate to the need/concern in a variety of ways and are to be used only as a springboard for further meditation and deliberation. In many cases the Scripture passage will be something you can share with a resident. It may be one of the most important gifts you can take with you as you visit. But be prepared to explain it and put it in a context.

Response: Here we offer some suggestions on what to say and do in response to certain needs of the elderly. We have tried to avoid pat answers, but have not always been successful: some pat answers are the truth! Don't be restricted by our suggestions. While the truth to be communicated remains the same, each individual requires and deserves a response tailor-made to suit his or her own specific problem. Be creative!

For Direct Sharing with the Elderly

Sharing Materials

These hymns and Scripture passages are especially suitable for sharing. Consider writing out a hymn or a few verses in large, bold print and leaving it with the person for his or her own personal meditation. This section of the chart can also be used to suggest ideas for hymns and Scriptures for worship services.

ANXIETY

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Oppression by others	Ps. 42:9	<p>There are two kinds of anxiety-producing situations—those we have no control over and those we do control. Determine which cause is relevant in each situation. If there is something that can be done, help the person do it. Whether it is relieving someone of the task of letter writing or exhorting him or her to flee from sin, you can prayerfully bear the burden without becoming anxious yourself.</p> <p>Listen, console, encourage, act when possible.</p>
Unbelief	Rom. 11:19-23; Heb. 3, 4	
Depression	Ps. 42:5, 11; 1 Tim. 5	
Self-indulgence	Rom. 6, 8; Eph. 2:3; 1 Tim. 5:6	
Unfamiliar, unknown surroundings	Heb. 11:8-10	
Disorder of life	1 Tim. 5:11-13	
Too many burdens	Isa 53:4	
Sin	Ps. 38:18	
Sexual frustration	Col. 3:1-6	
God overcomes anxiety	Ps. 16, 46; Is. 41:10; Jer. 17:7, 8; Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6, 7; 1 Tim. 5:5; 1 Pet. 5:6, 7	<p>Encourage a closer walk with God. He is the only one who can calm the anxious heart because He is the only one who really knows how to care for us.</p> <p>Read Scripture, pray and worship God together. This takes the focus off self and puts it on the good and powerful God. Be alert for especially anxious times such as impending surgery, room changes, etc.</p>

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 16, 46; Prov. 1:33; Is. 41:10; Matt. 6:25-34; Phil 4:6, 7; 1 Pet. 5:6, 7	Be Still, My Soul; What a Friend...; Jesus, Lover of My Soul	Fear, Peace; and those that deal with potential causes of anxiety such as Death, Companionship, Economic Adjustment.

COMFORT

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Expressing sorrow	Pss. 6, 13, 88, 102	Study the biblical way of expressing sorrow and grief. Emotions are not meant to be bottled up inside, or to be made known in bitterness, complaining and false accusation. Rather, the elderly should be encouraged to pour out their souls to God.
The comfort of God	Ps. 103:13; Isa. 51:12, 55:6, 7; Lam. 3:19-24; Matt. 5:4; John 14:18; 2 Cor. 1:3-5	If God has indeed forsaken us and left us comfortless, then we have reason to remain forever in our grief and sorrow. Remembering what God has done in the past is a good way for Christians to be encouraged that God is faithfully loving us in the present, in spite of how things may appear.
The comfort of Christ	1 Thess. 2:16, 17; Heb 2:17, 18; 1 Pet. 2:21	Christ suffered and was tempted to sin just as we are. Praise Him for the comfort of the salvation we have as a result of His suffering and perfect life.
The comfort of God's word	Ps. 119:50-52, 76	Meditating on God's promises and love for us is a great comfort.
The comfort of others	Gen. 24:67; 2 Cor. 7; 1 Thess. 4:18	God wants us to receive comfort from people as well as from Him directly. You can be a bearer of comfort as you share how God has comforted you, as you listen patiently while people pour out their hearts, and as you read Scripture and pray.

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 23; Lam. 3:19-24; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; 1 Thess. 2:16, 17	Leaning on the Everlasting Arms; How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds; Jesus, Lover of My Soul; The King of Love My Shepherd Is	Grief, Anxiety, Hope.

COMPANIONSHIP

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
The need for companionship	Gen. 2:18-25; John 14:16-18; 1 Cor. 12	We were created for fellowship. We need not be ashamed of loneliness, but neither should we complain or be bitter if God has not given us friends at any particular time.
The purpose of companionship	Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4, 5; Col. 3; 1 Tim. 5	Friends should build one another up. Encourage the elderly to say kind words to one another, to encourage the staff, to praise God with other Christians.
Causes of loneliness	Ps. 88:6, 102; Prov. 12:18; 16:18, 28; 17:9, 13, 14, 18-20; 18:1; Rom. 5:3-5; Phil. 1:29; Heb. 12:14, 15; Jas. 1:1-12	If we don't have friends, it may be that our character needs to be conformed more closely to Christ. Is there anger, bitterness, a quarrelsome or complaining spirit that makes an individual not the kind of person people want as a friend? Help him or her deal with this problem. Or perhaps others are sinning by standing aloof from someone who is sick or mentally unbalanced. Show them by example as well as word how to love unselfishly.
Characteristics of a friend	Ps. 35:13, 14; Prov. 17:17; 18:24; 27:6, 10; Matt. 5:43-48; 7:1-6; 18:15-20; Luke 10:30-37; John 15:13; Rom. 12:9-21; 14; 15:1-7; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 4; Heb. 10:23-25	Work on practical ways of showing friendship—a kind word, a small gift, shared food, help with a phone call. There are many ways the elderly can befriend one another.
God as Friend	John 14:23; 15:14, 15; Eph. 2:12, 13ff.; Phil. 4:19; Pss. 90, 91	Show God's love by being a friend yourself. Visit regularly, bring gifts, telephone, write letters, especially on special days like a birthday, Christmas, Valentine Day and Mother's Day. Point to God as the real Friend who will never leave nor forsake, and whom we long to be with forever.

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Psalms; Proverbs; Rom. 12:9-21; 1 Cor. 13	What a Friend We Have in Jesus; Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners; God Will Take Care of You; Leaning on the Everlasting Arms	Grief, Self-Esteem, Peace.

CONTENTMENT

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Assurance	John 10:10; Col. 2:2, 3; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22, 35, 36; 1 John 3:18-22	We have God's promise that if we persevere in doing His will, we will be saved. This is not to encourage salvation by works, but to point to the graciousness of God.
Happiness	Ps. 16:11; 32:11; 36:8; 132:15; Acts 14:17	Knowing who you are (Christ's precious possession) and where you are going (heaven) can give the deepest happiness of all.
Friendship and God's presence	Deut. 30:15; Ps. 16:11; 17:15; 25:14; 65:4b; 90:14; John 15:12-17; Heb. 12:1-3	Evaluate your resources as a friend. What can be done to become a friend to others? Encourage the elderly to get to know Jesus better as their Friend.
Provision for need; and prosperity	Deut. 30:3, 5, 9; Ps. 1; 24:1; 25:12, 13; 37:11; Matt. 5:5, 6; 6:24-34; John 6:35; Acts 14:17; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Phil. 4:6-12; 1 Tim. 6:5-10, 17-19; Jas. 5:1ff.	We may have a false idea of what our needs are, and think we need what we don't. At times we may suffer lack, but this unites us to Christ as we turn to Him in these times of need.
Future	Ps. 16; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:12; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1; Rev. 21:4	Discuss the future realistically—if possible, talk about attitudes to death. A personal relationship to Christ makes the future bright rather than dismal.

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 145:14-16; Phil. 3:7-11; 1 Tim. 6:6-8	Blessed Assurance; God Will Take Care of You; I Know Whom I Have Believed	Peace, Economic Adjustment, Anxiety.

DEATH

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Death itself	Gen. 2:16, 17; Deut. 30:15-20; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 4, 5; Phil. 1:20-26; 3:1-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11 (See Westminster Confession)	If you are ready to meet God, then the main obstacle to ridding yourself of fear is gone. Encourage a living, vibrant relationship with Christ—then there will be more eagerness.
Judgment	Ps. 96:10-13; John 3:4-21; 5:19-30; Acts 17:30ff.; Rom. 2; 2 Cor. 5; 1 Pet. 4:17-19	Explain what judgment is, and how we can avoid condemnation by believing in Christ and committing our lives to Him.
Suffering, sickness	Is. 53; Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 5:10, 11, 13-16; 1 Pet.	Suffering, disease, weakness, decay—these are all results of the fall of man. But God is in control of all things—He has not forsaken the sufferer. For the believer, it is a blessing to suffer as Christ suffered. As you offer the hope that we have, don't do it glibly—try to understand objections that may arise, and don't forget to lend a sympathetic ear.
Decay	1 Cor. 15:49ff.; 2 Cor. 4, 5	
Weakness	Ps. 71:9; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10; Phil. 4:13; Heb. 11:34; 4:15, 16	
Models of attitude toward death	Luke 23:46; Acts 7:54-60; Phil. 1:20, 21; Jas. 5:10, 11	By thinking of how others have reacted to death and suffering, we prepare ourselves for our own death.

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 46; 96:10-13; Is. 41:10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18	When the Roll is Called up Yonder; The Solid Rock; The Strife is O'er	Grief, Fear, Thought Life, Hope and other related topics.

ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Lack of funds	Matt. 6:26-34; 2 Cor. 8, 9; Phil. 4:10-14; 1 Tim. 5:1-16	Consider how to obey 1 Timothy 5:1-16. Encourage diligence in prayer on the part of the older person (and yourself!). But remember 1 John 3:16, 17.
Poor understanding of money	Matt. 5-7; Luke 6, 12 (cf. 1 Cor. 3:21, 22)	Share from your own life your understanding of the value of material things, and perhaps any struggles you may be having as you seek to conform your life to God's way.
Greed	Eph. 4:17-19; Col. 3:1-6ff.	Teach, rebuke, exhort, encourage.
Robbery	Deut. 28; Ps. 27, 28, 35:9ff.; Heb. 10:32-39	Comfort them in their loss. Consider possible legal action, and see what agencies are available for help.
True hope and true riches	Ps. 17; 1 Cor. 3:21, 22; Gal. 4	Clarify and affirm what is of real value—friendship, love, inner attitudes expressed in life and the eternal relationship with God.

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 16; Matt. 5-7; Phil. 4:10-14; Col. 3:1-4	Count Your Blessings; God Will Take Care of You; He Is All I Need; Thou Art Worthy	Fear, Self-Esteem, Contentment, Thought Life.

FEAR

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Death	Matt. 10:28-32; 1 Cor. 15; Heb. 2:14, 15	We need not fear death, because Christ has gone before us to take the sting from death and to make death an entrance into life.
Judgment	Ps. 96:11-13; Rom. 5:1, 8:1; Heb. 10:26-31; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; 1 John 4:17-19	Judgment Day holds fear only for those who have not put their faith in Christ. Stress the need to trust in <i>His</i> righteousness, not our own.
The unknown	Matt. 6:31-34; John 14:1ff.; Heb. 11:8-10, 13; 5, 6	Worrying about the future will not change it. God is with us, so there is no need to fear what is to come.
Repetition of the past	Rom. 6:4-14, 19-23; Phil. 3:13, 14; 1 Pet. 4:1-3	Discuss the specific situation in the past that is a cause for fear. Find ways to learn from mistakes. Pray for release from repetition of the past, and trust God that He will answer.
Illness and suffering	Ps. 23:4; Rom. 8:28, 35-39; Phil. 3:7-11, 4:11, 12; 1 Pet.	Be there to comfort during illness and suffering.
Rejection by others	Ps. 22, 56, 94:14, 118:6; 1 Pet. 3:14, 15, 4:12-16	If there are things in the elderly that need changing, gently point them out and offer concrete suggestions as to how their attitudes could become different. Whether they are suffering for righteousness' sake or because of their own foolishness, clinging to God is an absolute necessity.
Failure, stupidity	Ps. 32:8, 9, 94:8-11; 1 Cor. 1:4-7, 18-31; 1 Cor. 2, 3	Foolish actions of the past must be laid aside and life lived in the present. Discern between true foolishness and the "foolishness" of the cross—which, in God's eyes, is true wisdom.
Antidotes to fear	Ps. 27, 33:18-22; Prov. 1:7, 3:5-8, 28:1, 14; Eccles. 12:13; Heb. 10:26-39; 1 John 1:5-10, 4:17-21	God is good, loving, wise, understanding—and <i>perfect</i> in all these attributes. We should fear (i.e. respect) only Him. There is nothing to fear when such a God cares for us.

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Pss. 27, 33; Is. 41:10; 1 John 4:17-21	Jesus, Lover of My Soul; Rock of Ages; How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds	Death, Physical Decay, The Past, Comfort.

GRIEF

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Emotions	John 11 (esp. vss. 19, 31-38); Rom. 9:1ff., 12:15; 2 Cor. 1, 2; 1 Thess. 4:13ff.	Be prepared for a whole range of emotions—hostility, fear, resentment, guilt, anger—as well as sadness. There <i>is</i> a proper way to express emotion.
Despair	Job 13:15; Ps. 42; 1 Thess. 4:13	Grief is sinful when it becomes despair. Learn from Job’s comforters how to listen.
Sorrow	Job 2:10; Ps. 31:9ff., 77; Prov. 14:13, 15:13, 17:22, 25:20; Is. 53:1-12, 35:10; Matt. 5:4	Jesus understands because He is well acquainted with grief. Let the sorrow of the elderly really sink into you—be sad with them. Explore the good things of the past, stressing God’s goodness and faithfulness.
Looking ahead	Prov. 16:1, 3, 9; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 3:13, 4:13; Rev. 21:1-5	A focus on Christ is essential if we are to look at the future without fear. Help the individual look for new possibilities of service to others. Set objectives and short-term goals. Reorganize life according to biblical principles.

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Pss. 23, 42, 77; Is. 53:3, 4; 2 Cor. 1:3ff.; Phil. 4:13	Be Still, My Soul; How Firm a Foundation; Man of Sorrows; Rock of Ages	Comfort, Hope, Fear and other related areas.

HOPE

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
The need for hope: Despair, depression	Ps. 42	<i>Listen</i> , then respond.
Feeling forgotten or afflicted	Ps. 42, 39:7, 8	Be consistent in visitation. Show genuine deeds of love.
Grief	1 Cor. 15:19; 1 Thess. 4:13-18	See chart on Grief.
Weighed down by sin	Ps. 130	Help them confess, if appropriate; stress Christ's sufficiency. Actively exhort, instruct and confront problem areas—dealing with real problems in God's way brings real hope.
The basis of hope: God's goodness	Jer. 17:7, 8 (cf. 17:5, 6); Eph. 1	Be realistic. Know God's promises and faithfulness. Share the gospel of hope.
God's faithfulness	Ps. 146 (esp. vss. 5, 6); Lam. 3:22, 23	Pray with and for them.
Christ	Eph. 2:12, 13; 1 Pet. 1:17-21	Read Scripture to them and encourage them to read on their own.
Holy Spirit	Rom. 15:13	
Scriptures	Rom. 15:4	
Building up hope: Perseverance through trials	Ps. 40; Rom 5:1-5, 15:4-6	Don't minimize present suffering. Acknowledge the struggle. Show how active obedience is possible—through right attitudes, continued prayer and giving of self for others—even in a nursing home!
Obedience	Ps. 31:23, 24, 119:113-120; Heb. 6:9-12; 1 Pet. 1:13ff.	
Waiting	Ps. 25, 27:14, 31:24, 62:5, 6	
Hope leads to faith	Heb. 11	Bring the familiar past to bear on the present. Reflect on God's goodness in the past.

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Rom. 15:4, 5; 1 Cor. 15:19, 20; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:1-3	The Solid Rock	Grief, Peace, The Past, Comfort.

THE PAST

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
<i>Negative concerns:</i> Sin	Ps. 25:7; Heb. 4:16; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; 1 John 1:9	A preoccupation with sin has only one cure—Christ! Stress the sufficiency of His death for sin, no matter what it is.
Failure	Josh. 1:8; Ps. 107; Rom. 7, 8:28; Phil. 3:13, 14; 1 Pet. 1:13-21	In God’s eyes we have all failed and deserve death—but Christ has borne that punishment. Past failures fade as God brings success in the present. How can you help an individual to be a success? Check Joshua 1:8.
Shame	Ps. 51; Rom. 6:21-23; 1 John 2:28	Much shame is connected with sin and failure; thus assurance of Christ’s abiding love and presence is important.
Escape	Ex. 16:2, 3; Num. 11:4, 5; John 8:31-59	While some reminiscing is therapeutic, a refusal to live in the present and deal with its problems should be discouraged. Start by trying to relate to the person where he is; then try to draw him into the present.
<i>Positive concerns:</i> Meditation	Cf. Thought Life	Give positive material as input upon which they may meditate. Scripture portions, hymns, your personal experience—all these can be valuably shared.
Thanksgiving	Pss. 105, 106; Phil. 4:8, 9	Reflection on the good things of the past is an encouragement to the one reflecting and to anyone with whom these things are shared.
Encouragement	Ps. 77:11-20; Rom. 15:4	Scripture was given to us as an encouragement. Encouragement comes as we reflect upon God’s goodness to His people.
Instruction to others	Ps. 71; 1 Cor. 10:11; Titus 2:3-5	The elderly should be encouraged to instruct young people by word and example.
Perspective on life	Phil. 3:1-16, 4:10-14	Reviewing the past (when one was healthy, strong, loved, etc.) is a necessary way of coping with the often dismal present.
Desire to be young again	Ps. 103:5; Is. 40:31	If possible, involve them in activity, especially with young people. “Borrow” a grade school class from a nearby school to show off costumes, give a program of skits and music—whatever. Youth is infectious, and many folks will feel younger just by being around the young.
Reality orientation	Heb. 12:1, 2	Involve them in our life and the life of the church. Use familiar songs and Scripture to help them relate past and present.

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Phil. 3:13, 14, 4:4-13	Faith of Our Fathers; How Firm a Foundation; Count Your Blessings	Hope, Thought Life.

PEACE

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Confusions / “senility”	Deut. 28:15-23, 28, 29, 50, 59, 61, 65, 66; Phil. 2:2, 5, 4:6, 7; Col. 3:15	Speak clearly, as if the person hears and understands you. Try to find a connecting thread in what you hear and respond to that idea. See also “Senility”.
Disobedience	Ps. 119:165; Is. 32:17, Rom. 8:6	If the person has a “grudge” against God, or is simply rebellious, remind your friend of the necessity of coming to Christ to find peace.
Unrest	Ps. 23, 116:6, 7; 131; Matt. 11:28-30; John 10; Heb. 3, 4	No amount of positive thinking can substitute for resting in Jesus and trusting Him to care for all our needs.
Trials and tribulation	Is. 43:1, 2; 54:11-17; John 16:33; Rom. 8:33-39; Rev 3-5	If God is for us, who can be against us?
Disturbing personal relations	Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 3:13, 14; Col. 3:12, 13; Heb. 12:1,2, 14, 15	Encourage the elderly to do all they can on their side of any relationship to restore peace—and to pray for the other person(s) involved.
The road to peace	Is. 43; John 14:27, 16:33; Rom. 5:1, 14:17ff.; Gal. 5:22, 23; Eph. 2; Phil. 4:7, 8; Col. 3:15	Consult “Evangelism” for a description of how to share the gospel with the elderly. For those who are believers and need encouragement, see chart on Thought Life.

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 8:4; 23; John 14:27; Phil. 4:7, 8	Abide with Me; Peace, Perfect Peace; When Peace like a River; Leaning on the Everlasting Arms	Companionship, Anxiety, The Past, Hope.

PHYSICAL DECAY

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Weakness	Gen. 3; Ps. 84:5-7; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 4:5, 12:7-10; Rev. 21, 22	As much as you can, help the person to understand the process of physical aging—in relation to the curse of the Fall, to the cross, <i>and</i> to the resurrection life. Be willing to assist physically, although it would be wise to consult the nursing staff first.
Failing sight	Is. 29:16-20	Approach directly and wear bright colors. Don't assume they are deaf as well! Remember, large-print literature is useful if they have some sight. Touch is very important.
Failing hearing	Is. 29:16-20, 42:18-20	Come close and use lower resonances rather than louder speaking. Speak directly into the ear, or perhaps write. Consider learning sign language if the person knows it. Again, <i>touch</i> is crucial.
Sickness	Is. 53; Jas. 5:10, 11, 16, 18	Don't stop visiting for fear that the sick may not want to see you. On the contrary, this is often a time of even greater isolation, and thus there is greater need for your comfort and strength and ability to discuss spiritual matters. Proceed as normally as possible, being careful not to overtax their strength. Be ready for sickness to bring on depression or thoughts of death.
Chronic invalidism	Rom. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 4:6-18, 12:7-10; 1 Pet.	The chronic invalids, like the sick, perhaps need extra love and attention. Encourage them to do as much as they can do, and not despair. They are alive for a purpose—help them to discover it!

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 84; 2 Cor. 4:5, 12:7-10	A Mighty Fortress; Leaning on the Everlasting Arms	Fear, Anxiety, Death, Self-Esteem, Hope.

SELF-ESTEEM

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
What God thinks of me	Gen. 1-3; Pss. 91, 139; Matt. 10:29-31; Rom 3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1-3	Encourage a healthy view of man as created in God's image. Share passages that stress God's care for all His creatures and especially for Christians. BUT—be sure to show the fallen state of man, our unworthiness before God. And then—don't forget the hope that we have through salvation in Christ.
What I think of me	Job 10:1ff., 14:1ff.; Ps. 22:6; 39; 102	Don't underestimate the deep feeling of insecurity and lack of self-worth. Listen—you may find you agree on some points—but remember that Christ offers hope in the situation.
What others think of me	Ps. 37, 40:14, 15; 102	See if the anxiety is justified (e.g. a chronic complainer may not be well liked). Work to a solution, always stressing the priority of acceptance by God over acceptance by others. Work to evaluate priorities—what is most important?

SHARING MATERIALS

SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 139; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20	Just As I Am; Have Thine Own Way, Lord	Companionship, Peace, Time.

THOUGHT LIFE

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Proper objects of thought	Ps. 27:4; 77; Rom. 8:5-8; 2 Cor. 4:18; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:13	We can “set our minds” in various ways—through praise, worship of God, reading of Scripture, prayer, meditation on Scripture, fellowship with other Christians, sharing our faith with others. Help the elderly to engage in a variety of mind-setting activities. The best way to stop thinking about improper things is to fill the mind with good things. This should always involve meditation on Scripture. Help people make a list of eternal things—things to be thankful for. Involve them in sharing with others.
Combatting improper thought life	Rom. 7:19-25, 12:1, 2; Jas. 4; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; 1 John	
Relating thought to action—“putting off” and “putting on”	Rom. 13:12-14; Eph. 4:22-32; Phil. 4:8, 9; Col. 3:8-17; Jas. 1:21, 22	Help structure their life with meaningful activity: visiting others, making things for others, or—if they are very sick—praying for various concerns of the home and the world. If they are doing good for others, they will be too busy to let their thoughts slip into dwelling on wrong things. Likewise, if their thoughts are proper, encourage them to show it—through cheerfulness, not complaining; through kind, not harsh, words; through sharing, not selfishness.

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Ps. 103; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1-4	May the Mind of Christ, My Saviour; Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee; Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts	Hope, Self-Esteem, Peace, Contentment, Anxiety, Time.

TIME

RELATED CONCERNS	BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS	RESPONSE
Proper use of time	Ps. 1, 31:15, 34:1-3; Eccles. 3:1-8; 1 Thess. 5:16-18	Encourage purposeful activity—helping others, reading, knitting, stuffing envelopes—all with a focus on glorifying God.
Motivation for using time properly	1 Cor. 3:11-15, 10:31, 15:58; Phil. 3:13, 14; Col. 3:23, 24; Heb. 6:10-12	God has a purpose for His children. <i>Whatever</i> a person can do is not wasted—even if it’s “only” to pray. Our time is not our own, it is God’s. Our desire to please Him should motivate us to use our time wisely.
Hindrances to using time properly (laziness, weariness, depression, disobedience)	Prov. 12:24, 27, 13:4, 15:19, 18:9, 26:13-16; Matt. 25:14-30; Gal. 6:2-10	At times, exhortation to leave behind laziness and disobedience may be necessary. Remember that you may be the <i>only</i> person encouraging the elderly to use their time wisely. Provide literature, suggest Christian radio as an alternative to television, encourage visitation within the home. For those not mobile, help them focus on passages of Scripture for meditation.

SHARING MATERIALS		
SCRIPTURE	HYMNS	SEE ALSO
Prov. 26:13-16; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Heb. 6:10-12	Take My Life; O Jesus, I have Promised	Thought Life.