**Chapter 8/Crisis & Self Care**

***Managing Crisis***

There may be some challenging circumstances in which you find that you are called to care for someone. Homelessness, sexual assault, suicide, sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, neglect; these are some of the circumstances you may encounter as you serve at RWC. And they will all impact a pregnancy decision. While we are not a full-service organization, we can be a safe landing place for a woman or man in a difficult situation. We do this by:

* Ongoing, non-judgmental engagement with Client.
* Following the Center’s protocol for each situation and involving your supervisor.
* Being consistent in our relationship with them, doing what we said we would do.
* Providing good referrals to services that specialize in their presented need.
* Being a reliable “Care Team” member with other agencies representatives that the Client has given permission to be a part of their team.
* Praying regularly for the Client and the Care Team.

***We Ask Permission to Care***

A difference between the Center and other agencies is that we take the time to honor the Client by asking permission to care, by asking permission to share information and ideas, by asking permission to pray, by asking permission to call them later to see how they are doing. By taking the time to listen, by working to understand their circumstances and situation, by keeping our motives pure, we honor their agency and freedom. We do this as we spend time with them, asking if we may hug or touch. We look to make all our policies and procedures are manipulation free. And we ask if we can share their photo, their babies’ photo, their story. We understand that it is their story to share, not ours. We do this verbally. We do this in writing.

By doing all of this – we affirm each Client’s autonomy. We can serve them out of relationship, not transaction, avoiding agendas. We are able to “see” them as they are but encourage them towards where they want to be and cheer them on as they grow. We are also treating them as the Holy Spirit does, setting a stage for them to be led towards grace and freedom, not works and law.

It starts when we answer the phone, meet them at the door, walk them through their initial appointment. It continues as long as they want to participate in our process. While it is important what we do, it is just as important how we do it and why we do it. Asking permission to care keeps us in good boundaries and then doing what ‘ve said we will do keep the trust level high in our care.

***Caring & Encouragement***

*Hebrews 10:19-25 MSG*

*“So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into “the Holy Place.” Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. The “curtain” into God’s presence is his body. So let’s do it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out. Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.”*

Encouragement does not go unnoticed. We have the best brought out of us when positive and hopeful words are shared with us. When people take time acknowledge hard work or efforts. When others see you may be struggling and offer a shoulder or an ear. Encouragement is what makes Christians so unique in this world! Why? We simply understand that we can take our struggles, fears, dreams, hopes, life-questions to Our Father and know that He **will** answer. We have Someone we can go to who is good, who has the power to fix things and always has our best interest at heart:

* God is loving. 1 John 3:1
* God is faithful. Psalm 145:17
* God is powerful and mighty. 1 Chronicles 29: 11-12
* God is sovereign and just. 2 Chronicles 20:6
* God is compassionate and gracious. Psalm 103:8
* God is good. Psalm 136:1
* God is holy. Isaiah 6:3
* God is forgiving and merciful. 1 John 1:9
* God is our refuge and help. Psalm 46:1
* God is with us. Isaiah 41:10

***Self-Reflection***

How does knowing these things about God encourage you as you serve?

How does hope in this knowledge affect your ability to encourage others?

How does the fact that God is faithful affect your ability to encourage others?

How have you been encouraged by someone?

As you think about the people you have been called to care for, why is being a person of encouragement important?

Encouragement is an important aspect of the helping process. To enhance our ability to encourage others it is important to understand that difference between *sympathy* and *empathy*. It is something we discussed in our very first lesson but let’s review:

*Sympathy* includes kindness toward someone who is suffering. It includes pity, commiseration and compassion. It involves sharing the feelings of others, especially feelings of sorrow or anguish.

Sometimes it can draw us into their situation so deeply that it is hard to help them. It can be described as two people in the same pit trying to help each other out - both have fallen in and it is hard to help one another out.

*Empathy* identifies with and understands a person’s situation, emotions and motives but from a position where help and support can be provided. An empathetic person can help someone who is suffering without being overwhelmed by the emotions they are experiencing, like a person standing in a strong and safe location outside of the pit and looking to help pull another out.

While sympathy strongly links our feelings to the feelings of someone who is suffering, empathy helps us walk in their shoes to understand their pain in a way that guides us to better assist them. Encouragement is the fuel that uses aspects of sympathy and empathy to strengthen and motive us through really hard times.

We also need to understand the difference between flattery and encouragement. Flattery is self-motivated and comes with an ulterior motive. It is the act of praising somebody because you want something from them. It is not sincere. Encouragement is humble and it has no motive other than inspiration. It is a sincere compliment. It functions as a way for people to see themselves through your appreciative eyes, like a reflection in a mirror. It reflects what is going well, a statement of observed truth about a person that is positive – beyond what you may think of that person in that moment. Affirmation of our positive traits can be very encouraging!

***Group-Reflection***

**One Word Exercise**

1. Gather a small group of friends or family. Each person takes 5 minutes and writes down one encouraging word for everyone in your group. Encourage the group to be creative in their word selection.
2. Each person gets a chance to hear the words selected to encourage them as the group takes a minute to share their words about a group member. (Example: Susie listens while everyone in the group shares the word they have selected to encourage her. Then, it is another group members turn to be encouraged and hear the words selected to encourage them.) After everyone has had a chance to be encouraged, answer the following questions:
* How did you feel about the encouraging words you received?
* How did it feel for you to be encouraged?
* How did it feel to be the encourager?
* Describe the last time you were encouraged by someone in any way. What did it do for you?
* Finally, what steps do I need to take to become a more encouraging person?

***Nourishing the Soul***

Spiritual nourishment is just as important to our bodies as physical nourishment. Our existence is more than physical, it is emotional and spiritual. We need to receive regular spiritual nourishment because:

* No one can give what they do not possess.
* You can only take someone as far as you have gone.
* If you keep spending without replenishing resources, you will go bankrupt.
* Regular spiritual nourishment is the foundation for effective ministry to others - fill up and give out.

It is an example set for us by Jesus Himself as He walked the earth - and He is perfect! Spiritual nourishment is the foundation for effective ministry to others by filling us with God’s grace, mercy and love so that we can share those same elements of true life.

Spiritual disciplines help us get a regular stream of spiritual nourishment. In *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, Pastor John Ortberg describes some of the most important disciplines:

* Celebration.
* Slowing down - eliminating hurry from our lives to be available to God and others.
* Prayer.
* Service.
* Confession.
* Guidance from the Holy Spirit.
* Secrecy-doing good quietly without expectation of praise from others, so that “your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing” Matthew 6:3-4.
* Meditating on God’s Word.

Other classic Christian spiritual disciplines include fasting, silence/solitude, Scripture memorization and simplicity.

***Self-Reflection***

Chose a spiritual discipline to practice for a specific time in this next week. This might mean having a ‘secret service day’, a period of fasting, a week of slowing down or even celebrating!

How does this spiritual discipline nourish you? How might your experience nourish others?

***Care Giver Burnout***

There is something called Caregiver Burnout…it even appears in the Bible! Take a minute to read through the story of Elijah after he has overextended himself in 1 Kings 19.

Caregiver Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion. It may be accompanied by a change in attitude, from positive and caring to negative and unconcerned. Burnout can occur when caregivers don't get the help they need, or if they try to do more than they are able: physically, spiritually, emotionally or financially.

We can easily become like Elijah if we do not take time to care for ourselves - especially spiritually. What we do as caregivers is mostly spiritual work. Spiritual disciplines keep us from wearing down and wearing out - and wearing out others.

***Accepting Our Limits***

God works in our lives to demonstrate our limits to us - not that He is mean or tortuous to us in our service to Him but as we grow, we do experience painful circumstances when we take our eyes and ears off of His guidance…like Elijah. We need to understand:

* We are not God in the lives of those around us.
* We cannot bring about healing or change.
* We cannot force a person to perceive truth.
* We cannot fix everything for them.
* We cannot restore them.
* Only God can do these things.
* Our job is to be faithful in our tasks and humbly wait for God to do the rest.

It is important to remember that although God has assigned us to be helpers to those around us, He has never asked us to be their source. We cannot be. We must always point people to THE source, Jesus Christ. We can never fill every need of every person in every area. We cannot advocate dependency on us but dependency on God alone. We can do all God has called us to do, all the while pointing them to their Healer, Provider, Restorer and Mender.

***Self Reflection***

Take 10 minutes and journal the following questions:

* In what ways have you come to know your limits when caring for others?
* How do you know when you have reached your limit?
* How easy or difficult is it for you to respond to the counsel of other wise and caring Christians in this area?
* In what ways are you expanding your limits as you grow in Christ? As you grow in service to Him?
* How has God helped you, like He did Elijah, when you were past your limit?

As we stated in Session 1, we need to know our limits - what we can and cannot do for people:

* We cannot be their “Savior”.
* We cannot be their parent.
* We cannot be their personal counselor.
* We cannot make decisions for them or tell them what to do.
* We cannot fix all of their problems or heal all of their pain.

We can, and should:

* Love them.
* Accept them.
* Listen to them.
* Pray for them.
* Encourage them.
* Share what we have learned with them.
* Guide them into God’s grace and truth.

Accepting your limitations will help us understand our primary objective - to help people connect and depend on Jesus Christ.

*1 Thessalonians 5:13-24 MSG*

*“Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part. Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other’s nerves you don’t snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out.*

*Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.*

*Don’t suppress the Spirit, and don’t stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don’t be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what’s good. Throw out anything tainted with evil.*

*May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he’ll do it!”*