

Reclaiming Our Calling: Deacons & Ruling Elders and the Care of Souls

A PC(USA) Leader Formation Webinar

Number 1—It is not suffering that destroys. Rather, it is suffering in isolation that destroys.

Number 2—It is not your responsibility to explain to anyone why something has happened or why God did this.

Number 3— All of our feelings are not only acceptable but even invited by God.

Number 4—Always listen for the underlying feeling and attend to that first. Most of us listen for content and respond to content. We miss the weight of what people are often saying.

Number 5—Never let tears go unacknowledged.

Number 6—Anger is the flashing red light that says, “danger, danger—something important to you has been threatened.” Anger lets us know when one of our boundaries has been crossed.

Number 7—Sadness, especially in grief, is love in the absence of its object.

Number 8—Fear or anxiety is a communication that something important to us is at risk.

Number 9—Always, always, always assume that the person’s suffering is greater than they first communicate.

Number 10—It is not suffering that redeems, but rather it is love that is willing to suffer that redeems.

Number 11—While you might symbolize something like God in the encounter, always remember that the person before you in need is Jesus.

Number 12—I alluded to it before, but to make it plain—it is often our avoidance of suffering that causes the most suffering.

Number 13—When you try to make a suffering person happy, you often will make them more depressed. When you enter into their pain, you will make them feel grateful and loved.

Number 14—When a suffering person repeats themselves for the third or fourth time about a particular point, they are likely politely telling you that you did not truly hear them. Validate the feeling behind that point.

Number 15—Telling someone to stop hurting themselves is rarely effective.

Number 16—Respond to the most important thing they say, not the last thing they say.

Number 17—Learning to live with the questions, or with that which is unresolved in your own soul, is the chief skill needed.

Number 18—Don’t say “me too.” Show that you understand, don’t tell that you know.

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Number 19—If someone mentions that they are praying, ask them what they are praying or hoping for.

Number 20—If you are going to pray with/for someone, always ask them what they want you to pray for and pray for that.

Number 21—Don't use prayer as an exit strategy.

Number 22—Use statements as much as questions. (Sounds like there's a story there...)

Number 23—Use questions to bring focus and further depth.

Number 24—Always respect people's confidentiality. Also, respect people's privacy, but not too much.

Number 25—Take the person's suffering seriously, but not more seriously than the person or their God.

Number 26—Remember how you have become who you are. Most of us have primarily grown not through ease but through dis-ease. Help others to tolerate suffering and dis-ease and not have to be alone with it with the hope that perhaps new seeds grow best in soil that has been tilled.

Number 27—Easter does not need to be protected from Good Friday. And God does not need to be protected from or have us defend God in the face of suffering.