

Lesson Five

Serving Families in Times of Celebration and Crises

Synopsis

This lesson will help equip participants by providing basic knowledge, as well as needed tools, in order to provide effective ministry to members of the congregation and community during celebrations and also provide compassionate ministry during times of crisis.

Learning Outcome

The student will

- describe the biblical-theological basis for celebrations and crises
- discuss the importance of celebrations
- identify the most significant celebrations and crises
- implement a pastoral, biblical intervention model to serve families empathically and ethically during times of crises

Learning Objective

The student will know

- be introduced to effective methods for serving families during times of celebration and crises

Lesson Outline

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- The Importance of Celebrations Today
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Lesson Five

Serving Families in Times of Celebration and Crises

Introduction

Frequently, our experiences open paths to the truths and values that shape our personality. It is through these experiences that we grasp an understanding for both the festive and hopeful side of reality. Families are formed according to the determination of what they celebrate and how they celebrate it. They have celebrations in order to create expectations of unity, share mutual expressions of love and joy, engage in religious experiences, and develop healthier families. We also know that families are exposed to critical times we call crises. Some crises happen because they are a part of life's natural course; while others are not related to its vital cycle but are instead related to unforeseen circumstances. Either way, during these times families must face the challenge to modify their accustomed responses to recurring internal and external stress factors.

Times of celebration and crises within the family offer the church and the pastor the opportunity to provide effective ministry. They may often do this with a biblical and theological reflection that enhances these events. It is the goal of this lesson to equip participants with basic knowledge and needed tools that will enable them to effectively minister to their congregants and to the community during these times.

Serving Families During Times of Celebrations

Biblical-Theological Foundations for Celebrations

In the Bible, we find there were public festivities for the community and families to celebrate the cycle of nature, i.e. planting and harvesting of crops. There were also historic celebrations, whether national or sacred, that were reminders of past events. These festivities and others were characterized by a high level of participation and a halt in all working places.¹

"Times of celebration and crises within the family offer the church and the pastor the opportunity to provide effective ministry."

In the Old Testament, the Jews expanded on several feasts that were related to the significant moments of Jewish life (Leviticus 23:2-6; Numbers 28 and 29; Deuteronomy 16:1-17). These observances provided opportunities to acknowledge God as the creator and sustainer of all the earth—the crops, time, history, national life, etc. For example, all agreements were

cancelled during Jubilee year—meaning that all debts were cancelled, and slaves were set free. This observance was a great motivation for celebrating God’s provisions and goodness.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus participating in celebrations. Richard J. Foster observes that,

*Celebration is at the heart of the path that leads to Christ. He entered this world with a high jubilee note: "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10, 11). When he left this world, he left his joy to the disciples: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (John 15:11)."*²

Jesus observed the Jewish festivities of his time. We know from Scripture that he and his family participated in wedding celebrations, among other celebrations. He took advantage of the festivities to illustrate his message and mission, giving it a new meaning. That is what happened during the Feast of the Tabernacles (John 7:37; 8:12; Matthew 21:1–10) and Jesus’ dedication (John 10:22–28). The Passover is the framework deliberately chosen by Jesus to institute a new covenant in his blood (Matthew 26:2, 17, 28; John 13:1; 19:36; 1 Corinthians 5:7). The Passover, First Fruits, Pentecost, and other festivities illustrate some of the most significant events in the life of Jesus, the Messiah, and explain why such events are an important part of the divine redemption.³ In the same matter, Christianity has adopted some of the Jewish festivals, as well as giving new content to celebrations related to our nations, communities, and ethnic backgrounds.

The Importance of Celebrations Today

Throughout the world today, families host celebrations as a mean of expressing their most intimate realities. Family celebrations develop a full sense of contentment and positive values. Religious and family celebrations are resources that families can use to educate children,

"Families, especially fathers and mothers, are the most important agents in the development of their children."

increase and maintain their social networks, and pass on their traditions. These celebrations are important for the children, who can establish a relationship with other relatives, regardless of their age. Furthermore, the children learn social skills, are often given the opportunity to express their views, participate in family customs, and experience closeness, love, and sense of belonging in their families. These experiences directly affect their sense of well-being.

Families, especially fathers and mothers, are the most important agents in the development of their children. Through the family, children can learn rules about behavior, receive love and affection, gain confidence, etc. Religious and family festivities are the ideal stage for this.

According to psychologist Rocio Navarro, a family celebration is a good way to get closer to our children. Participation in these celebrations increase trust and knowledge. In addition, a family celebration is a good way to enhance the potential in children to develop positively.⁴

- **Cognitive and emotional development.** Conversations taking place among family members help children in expressing their opinions, desires, and inquiries about certain topics, while also allowing them to show their emotions and feelings.
- **Self-esteem.** When we value their opinions, children feel heard. They notice that what they have to say matters to others. It makes them feel secure, loved, integrated, and respected by their families.
- **The ability to communicate.** A celebration is a good way to put into practice social abilities. For example, learning to take turns when speaking and coming up with

their own ideas are ways to help them become better communicators.

- **Resolution of problems.** Celebrations provide great teachable opportunities to learn how to solve problems by looking for shared solutions, putting into practice abilities, such as negotiating and cooperation, and improving the family environment.
- **Encouragement of family values.** Family celebrations are a great way to instill values such as respect, listening to others, responsibilities, etc.

Family traditions leave a mark that later becomes an emotional memory to treasure. When members begin their own families, they put into practice customs and traditions of their families of origin, recreating the environment and sensations they have experienced in their developmental years.

The Pastor and Celebrations

Family Celebrations

Wedding celebrations

For most believers, one of the most important celebrations in their lives is the wedding day. Besides accepting Jesus as their Savior, this event has an unquestionable impact on their future. The wedding ceremony can accomplish the following—

- strengthen relationships as family and friends come together to celebrate this significant moment
- impress on all present the sacredness of marriage, when two people covenant to be united as one in the presence of God
- reinforce the significance of the family biblically, and the culture as a new home is established under God's blessing⁵

Wedding celebrations can vary from a simple ceremony including only the bride, groom, officiator, and witnesses to the most elaborate ceremony that could include several days of celebration activities. Regardless of the size, some elements of the celebration are foundational. Included in all Christian wedding

"The family dynamics of each couple is different and should be acknowledged through personal touches in the ceremony."

ceremonies is a message about marriage from Scripture, marriage vows, prayer for the couple, and proclamation and presentation of the two becoming one.

In addition to the foundational Christian wedding traditions, many are creative in personalizing their ceremonies to more intimately include family, friends, and church family as well. It is not uncommon in today's wedding ceremonies to see parents or children taking a larger role, and family or church family participating in music, readings, and prayer or personal blessing. If stepfamilies are involved, the ceremony may include a promise or covenant to the children by the new parent. The family dynamics of each couple is different and should be acknowledged through personal touches in the ceremony to include loved ones and to honor God.

A minister or pastor may also be asked to lead the couple in premarital counseling. This time of reflection and planning should not be overlooked or taken lightly. Premarital counseling can be completed privately with the couple or with other couples in a class format. If possible, the spouse of the minister should also be involved in the sessions, which adds another level of support. The amount and length of sessions may vary, but regardless, some basic topics should be covered. These topics include the couple's history, personal convictions, faith, and expectations for each other and for the future.

Birth and baby dedication celebrations

The birth and dedication of children is significant in the lives of parents, family members, and the local congregation. The Bible shares instances when children were dedicated to the Lord. One of the most well-

known is Hannah dedicating her son, Samuel, to the service of the Lord. (See 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11.) Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to God in obedience to Jewish law (Luke 2:22-24).

A baby's birth and dedication provide many opportunities to connect parents and other family members to the church. Prior to a baby's birth, the church might provide prenatal classes for first-time parents and give gifts to assure that the family has what is needed to care for the newborn. During the birthing process, the church has the opportunity to assist the family by providing meals and childcare for other siblings. The presence of the pastor or another member of the church's leadership during this time could be an opportunity to strengthen relationships and affirm the family's value to the church.

As stated, the dedication of a child is biblical; it is also spiritually and relationally significant today. The dedication provides a nonthreatening opportunity for unbelieving family members to attend your church. A thoughtfully planned dedication reminds the family, friends, and congregation of God's value of marriage, the family, and the child. It can also be a witness to God's love and His willingness to be in a covenant relationship with us (i.e. as the family commits to raising this child to know and love God). Finally, a well-executed baby dedication strengthens the family's connection to the local church and affirms the church's acceptance and welcome of family members, including those who are not believers.

Baby dedications should include several elements—

- a brief statement of the purpose of baby dedication.
- a statement of the family's commitment to intentionally instruct, disciple, and model the Christian life so that this child will come to know and love Jesus.
- a response from the child's family. This could go beyond the traditional, "Yes, I will..." The family could choose a life verse for the child and read it. The family could write a prayer for this child that is read during the dedication ceremony.

Individual family members could pronounce one-sentence blessings over the child at this time.

- a brief statement, perhaps in the form of a question, acknowledging the congregation's responsibility to model the Christian life before the child and consistently provide opportunities for the child to receive instruction, experience fellowship, and participate in opportunities to worship and serve.
- a brief response from the congregation, "We will."
- a pastoral blessing. The minister might lay his hands on the child or hold the child while he prays a prayer of dedication over the child and his family.
- awarding of a small gift that provides a reminder of this significant event. Often at the close of the dedication the family is given a children's Bible or devotional book for the parents.⁶

Congregational Celebrations

When God's people gather for worship, it is a time of celebration. Together with the congregation, families celebrate Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb. During congregational celebrations, families remember and reaffirm that our salvation and life in community as the body of Christ is possible because God has extended His grace to us.

Water Baptism

Water baptism is one of Christianity's most important ordinances. Dr. Justo Gonzalez notes:

It is the initiation traditional ceremony into Christianity. Its name is derived from a Greek verb that means to bathe, to immerse, and sometimes to be engulfed in, as in the case of a flood.⁷

Baptism in water is mentioned, discussed, or alluded to in almost every book of the New Testament.

- John the Baptist urges the Jews to be baptized, implying that their sin is such that they have become unclean, and therefore they must now undergo a

- repentance and purification (Matthew 3:2).
- Jesus was also baptized, which clearly shows not only the value, but also the circumstances of His baptism, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water” (Matthew 3:16).
- It is clear in the New Testament that the early church practiced baptism since its beginning—the book of Acts records this practice being done immediately after Pentecost.

Even though little is said about how it is to be administered, it seems to be “in the name of Jesus” while others practice it “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”⁸ In the New Testament, no one was baptized until after conversion. This is a great distinctive of the so-called “baptism of the believers.” Only new converts should be baptized. “Then they that gladly received His word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). They had to receive His word through preaching before the baptism.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

They had to believe before being baptized. Therefore, in the New Testament, baptism always comes after conversion, never before. There are many reasons believers should be baptized.

- The desire to follow Christ’s example and fulfill Christ’s command (Matthew 28:19).
- Through water baptism the new believer identifies him/herself with Christ. It is a testimony of the inward work of the Holy Spirit uniting a person with Christ in his

death, burial, and resurrection (under the water—death and burial; out of the water—resurrection), (see Romans 6:3, 4). “Water baptism is a sacramental sign of the saving work of Jesus Christ in the heart and life of the believer ... it proclaims the spiritual death of our old life and the spiritual resurrection of our new life in and through Jesus Christ.”⁹

- Baptism is a step taken by a new convert in preparation for becoming a member of the local church. “Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

Elements of the baptismal service that engage the congregation and family—

- Baptism is a public ceremony that is attended by the congregation. It is a celebration marked with worship in song, testimony, and prayer.
- In nations where there is freedom to express your faith in Christ, water baptism is an opportunity for the new believer to invite family members as well as friends and coworkers to the celebration, giving witness to unbelievers that the believer identifies himself with Christ and members of His body.
- Another opportunity for participation by observers is to have a believing friend or family member share a blessing in the form of a prayer or Scripture reading before the new believer is baptized.
- A suggested practice is to allow the candidate to share a testimony of his/her salvation experience before the congregation as a witness of his/her belief in Christ. A question might also be asked in the presence of the congregation, “Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross, and on the third day rose from the dead for the forgiveness of your sins?”¹⁰
- When it is time for the actual submersion, it is helpful to have participants cross their arms over their chest. Instruct them to close their nose with one hand and to

"Baptism is a public ceremony that is attended by the congregation."

firmly grip their forearm with the other. As you begin the submersion, hold one hand on the participants back and the other to the arms crossed in the front. It is often helpful to have a third person in the water with you to assist with the submersion. Participants should be submerged in water after the minister makes the following statement: "In obedience to the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."¹¹

Church Membership

It is the practice of the Church of God of Prophecy to unite members into the church through a covenant to God's Word in the presence of the local congregation. Accepting people as members in the local church is one of the most solemn activities of the ministry, but

"Accepting people as members in the local church is one of the most solemn activities of the ministry, but also an opportunity to celebrate!"

also an opportunity to celebrate!

Joining the Church of God of Prophecy comes after the experience of salvation, and it should not be inferred or implied that the church has any power to save. Individuals are united with the Church of God of Prophecy worldwide and the local church through a covenant. The idea of covenant derives from biblical teaching, beginning with Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and throughout the whole Bible. Jeremiah said,

They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten (Jeremiah 50:5).

The covenant is simple and should be memorized by the minister. Facing the candidates for membership and in the presence of the congregation, the minister asks them to enter into the following covenant to God's Word:

"Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God, believe and practice its teachings rightly divided—the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability?"

Each candidate should be given the opportunity to answer in the affirmative. When all candidates have answered, the minister should ask the congregation to pray for the spiritual growth and ministry of the candidates. At the conclusion of the prayer, the minister addresses the new members, "We now welcome you as members of the Church of God of Prophecy."

Membership in the church denotes acceptance, which is the basic need of every believer. Offer the congregation an opportunity within the service or immediately after the service to greet, accept, and celebrate new members.¹²

Encourage individuals to become members of the church by offering new believers or new attendees an opportunity to participate in a membership course. This course can provide valuable information about the importance of being part of the family of God in a covenant relationship. Also, candidates will be informed about the beliefs, practices, and ministries of the church.

Celebrations of the Christian Year

In recent decades, a new interest in the Christian year has been developing, even among churches that had been avoiding its use. More evangelicals are developing

an appreciation of celebrating the Christian year. They recognize that these are reminders of the lordship of Jesus Christ just as the festive days in the Hebrew year reminded Israel of God's covenant with His people.

The following is a summary of the main seasons and days in the Christian year. It includes a description of the theological importance for each element and an explanation about where each element appears in the calendar.¹³

The Christian Year		
Event	Theological Importance	Date
Advent	Coming of Christ	Starting the Sunday before November 30, till Christmas' Eve
Christmas	Incarnation of Christ	December 25, and the following Sunday or two.
Epiphany	The Manifestation of Christ	From January 6 until the first Lent Sunday
Lent	Consecration of the Believer	Forty days prior to Easter
Holy Week	Passion of Christ	Last week during Lent (it includes Palm Sunday and Holy Friday)
Easter	Christ's Resurrection	The first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring equinox (March 21st). Orthodox Easter is celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon after Passover.
Pentecost	Infilling of the Church	It occurs fifty days after Easter.

- **Advent.** The word advent means "coming." This celebration symbolizes the period preceding the birth of Christ, which was anticipated by those waiting the coming of the Messiah.
- **Christmas.** The birth of Christ is one of the two most important days in the liturgical year, second only to Easter. Christmas celebrations are opportunities to explain and rejoice over the events of Christ's birth. Regardless of the commercialized emphasis that has been given to Christmas in our time, we can put emphasis on the true meaning of gifting, and that the greatest gift of the world is Jesus Christ. Christmas celebration opportunities are varied and many. Some ideas include—
 - Celebration of Advent. During the weeks before Christmas, invite the families of your congregation to follow the Advent calendar. If possible, provide each family with an outline of the Advent themes, Scripture passages, and devotional thoughts to use in their family devotions. Each Sunday during worship, invite a family to read that week's Scripture passage and share a brief devotional related to the passage.
 - Re-enactment of the nativity. A narration of the Christmas story accompanied by characters dressed in biblical costumes is always a reminder of the truth that Jesus, the Son of God, humbled Himself to be born as a baby.

- A Christmas musical or play. A Christmas performance is an opportunity for the community to come to your church and experience the truths of a Christian Christmas celebration. Make every effort to assure that unbelievers experience Christmas truth that is presented with excellence, creativity, and Holy Spirit inspiration.
- A Christmas Eve candle lighting. On Christmas Eve, invite families to come together for a brief time of remembering Christ's birth. This time might include hymns and carols, response Scripture readings, and lighting of candles to signify that the "Light of the World" has come.
- **Epiphany.** This feast commemorates the manifestation of God's glory through his birth, baptism, and first miracle. It is celebrated on January 6. Since the Epiphany does not always fall on a Sunday, most churches observe the beginning of this season the first Sunday after January 6. The Epiphany season lasts until the first Lent Sunday. Depending on the date which Easter Sunday falls, this season can last up to nine weeks. Some appropriate sermon topics may include passages out of the Gospels that represent manifestations of Jesus' power through signs and miracles. Additional passages include those that describe Jesus as light of the world, warnings about Judgment Days and the Last Days, as taught by Christ, and messages on missions and evangelism for the church. The last Sunday of the Epiphany, just before the Lent, is a good occasion to preach about Christ's transfiguration.
- **Lent.** This is a season of preparation for Resurrection Day through fasting, prayer, and meditation. The Lent begins forty days prior to Easter and is known by many as Ash Wednesday. Sermons usually focus on the person of Christ, His life and work,

and His vocation and meaning to both the individual and society. The pastor can prepare sermons to address some of the outstanding events in Christ's ministry, His teachings, and miracles. Or, he/she can choose to preach about the spiritual disciplines in the Christian walk, such as prayer, studying the Bible, service, and evangelism.

- **Holy Week.** This week is the last Lent week, and it stands out for the daily commemorations that took place the week before the Resurrection. The first main event is Palm Sunday, which marks Christ's entering into Jerusalem. The Monday in

"The Monday in the Holy Week traditionally focuses on the Temple purification."

the Holy Week traditionally focuses on the Temple purification. Tuesday registers the long controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and other Jewish authorities. Wednesday usually focuses on the discourses given in the Upper Room taken from John 14-17. Thursday commemorates the Lord's Supper, which comes from the Latin *mandatum*, in reference to the new commandment Jesus gave the disciples that appears in John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Holy Friday commemorates the events of the crucifixion, including Gethsemane, the trial, and the cross. Holy Saturday ends the week with Jesus in the tomb. George Gibson writes that by the end of the Holy Week, "people are in expectation—after the minister has taken them through this reoccurring experience, they are ready for the resurrection on the first day of the week and for the glorious

season following resurrection.”¹⁴

- **Easter.** This is the most important day in the Christian Year. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday following the full moon after March 21. The Easter season lasts for seven weeks, after the Resurrection Sunday. The sermon for this Sunday and

" The sixth Thursday after Easter is celebrated with the ascension of Christ. "

this entire season emphasizes Christ resurrecting from the tomb. The Bible texts to preach include some of the narratives found in the Gospels, as well as the many passages in both the Old and New Testament related to the gift of eternal life obtained through the Son. The sixth Thursday after Easter is celebrated with the ascension of Christ. Often, the Sunday following that Thursday is also used to commemorate the ascension.

As with Christmas, consider new and traditional ways to celebrate this Christian event with families and your community.

- Prepare a devotional on Passion week, Christ's last week here on earth, for families to follow.
- Celebrate Palm Sunday. This is the day when Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem. Plan a worship service that is filled with praise. Include the children in this service as they were when Jesus entered the city. Provide branches for them to wave as they shout praises.
- Celebrate the Lord's Supper. On Thursday evening (Maundy Thursday) before His capture and ultimate crucifixion, Jesus ate His last supper with the disciples. Plan a worshipful and intimate opportunity for families to participate in the Lord's Supper together on that evening.
- Sunrise service on Easter morning.

Although the time may not be convenient for families, offer them the opportunity to witness the rising of the sun on this Easter morning with a brief time of worship. If possible, close the service with a community breakfast.

- The Resurrection Celebration. Greet one another with, "He is risen. Yes, He is risen indeed." Again, this is an opportunity for unbelieving family members to attend your church. Engage them in meaningful and excellent worship and ministry of the Word.
- **Pentecost.** On this Sunday, the pouring of the Holy Spirit is commemorated. Some of the topics appropriate for Pentecost include the Holy Spirit, the mission, and life of the Church.

Serving Through Family Crises

Biblical-Theological Foundation for Family Crises

In the Old Testament, the book of Job presents a dialog about suffering in terms of the relationship between the human being and God. His main topic is, "Why do the just suffer?" The purpose of this wonderful document (the book of Job) is to help us see crises as a time for us to grow and shape our character. This book has been interpreted by many as an intent to explain human suffering. Job lived through a great crisis; he lost it all in a "blink of an eye"—all he had worked hard for and secured slipped through his hands in a few moments. When we read the biblical passage, we find a godly man, who without a doubt stood out for doing good for himself and for his family. Even so, he experienced a circumstantial crisis. When facing this economic and family disaster, Job reaffirmed his faith, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21).

Let's consider great crises during New Testament times. Before Jesus came to this world in His human and divine form, many

dangerous situations had provoked crises for the Jewish people. Some of those crises were: The rise of the Maccabees (167 BC–70 AD); King Herod the Great's reign (37–4 BC); social, political, and economic discrimination during the Herodian aristocracy that left the people oppressed, poor, and hopeless; rebellious

"Jesus understood how to handle each crisis and take care of the people in their suffering."

movements against Herod (Maccabees/Zealots); Herod's kingdom divided into three parts; the Roman government's census to create an economic burden and servanthood; a loss of Israel's identity as a nation and God's chosen people, both in culture and religion; inferior condition of women in relation to men; moral corruption in leadership and authorities.

Regardless of all these things, Jesus understood how to handle each crisis and take care of the people in their suffering. He showed His capacity to be an excellent reconciler. Let's consider some situations: Jesus showed compassion and ended the suffering of a crowd that had gone three days without food (Mark 8:1–10). He had a face-to-face encounter with the Samaritan woman, and she experienced acceptance, forgiveness, and salvation (John 4:1–42). In His dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus discovered his real need—to be born again (John 3:1–15). Jesus presented the paralyzed man at the Bethesda pool the opportunity to make a personal decision (John 5:1–15). He gives solution and hope (Mark 10: 26, 27). He knows all details and puts our thoughts in order (Luke 5:17–26). He offers forgiveness and gives true peace (Matthew 5:21–26).

Important Definitions of Crises ¹⁵

When we talk about crises, we are referring to that temporary state of disorder and disorganization usually characterized by 1) the

individual or family's inability to solve problems using known methods and strategies, and, 2) the potential to generate positive or negative radical results. Crises do not in any way represent an illness or pathology. They are part of the universal human experience.

An individual or a family may fall into a crisis when an unexpected event or circumstance is perceived as a devastating moment (for instance, the sudden death of a loved one). Another circumstance that may trigger a crisis is an event that can be interpreted as threatening (for example, losing a job or all finances). In the face of such difficult times, people often break down and seem unable to find an effective way to face it.

Both the crisis and its resolution will depend on a combination of factors, including both the triggering event and personal resources—family, community, culture, and religion. It's expected for a crisis to last for a limited period of time. For better or worse, they can vary from a few days to a few weeks (a maximum of 6 to 8 weeks) to be resolved. Neither the person nor the family system tolerates high levels of disorganization during long periods. However, it is important to realize that grieving a significant loss takes much more than a few weeks or months. Grieving a loss may take years.

Types of Family Crises ¹⁶

Family crises can be categorized as circumstantial crises, developmental crises, structural crises, or abandonment crises. The circumstantial crises are unexpected crises. They present an unforeseen manifestation of stress rising out of external forces, unknown both to the individual and the family. Some examples include wars, illnesses, accidents, fires, earthquakes, coin devaluation, high living cost, etc.

Developmental crises in a family often happen when a family structure is unable to incorporate into the new developing stage of any of its members or the family itself. Some of these events may include migration or divorce.

These events can be considered as vulnerable aspects experienced by every family and can result in a crisis.

Structural crises are a recurrent result of the internal dynamics and exacerbation in the family. Frequently, this type of crisis is the result of an intention to avoid changes. These crises originate from hidden, unresolved, and underlying tense moments in the family structure itself, before external forces or developmental stages. These are some of the crises most dysfunctional families suffer, including domestic violence and addiction.

Abandonment crises appear when dysfunctional or dependent members are present, when the help needed is specialized or difficult to obtain, and when the family loses control of those depending on them.

Pastoral Care and Family Crises

First Pastoral Care¹⁷

Here are a few general suggestions to offer during the first pastoral care intervention in a crisis:

- **Listen empathetically.** This is most important. When you listen with empathy, it means that you are trying to perceive the world through the other person's point of view.

"Do not be intimidated by the expression of strong emotions. These emotions are normal and natural."

- **Refrain from preaching, lecturing, or giving advice.** The best support you can give to a person in crisis is your presence and solidarity, not your words.
- **Do not be intimidated by the expression of strong emotions.** These emotions are normal and natural. Any person affected needs to express and vent his/her emotions, not restrain them. Crying is

healthy to an affected person.

- **There's not an easy response to human suffering.** To acknowledge the mystery behind life and death, joy and sadness, or laughter and crying is what reveals the humanity in us and communicates hope.
- **Know and accept your limitations.** You cannot resolve all problems. If you realize that you cannot handle a situation, consult a colleague, or refer the person or family to a professional counselor or therapist.

The A-B-C Intervention Model¹⁸

During the '60s, Warren Jones, a psychiatrist from Los Angeles, California, developed the A-B-C method to train lay personnel in a community center that served people in crisis. This model consists of the pastor/counselor moving through three sequential stages of help or ministry. This intervention model is usually effective in circumstantial crises.

- "A" represents reaching a relationship of openness and trust. It offers solicited attention, to listen without judgment, to consider the family in crisis and their capacity to confront the crisis, and to communicate this conviction. In summary, it is quick attention, listening emphatically, and evaluating family resources.
- "B" represents identifying the components of the crisis. It includes identifying and expressing feelings, defining the particular content of these feelings, adjusting the focus of attention when articulating what triggers these emotions, and recognizing the threat around needed resources.
- "C" means to combat actively. To identify, along with others, the resources the family has, and to establish achievable objectives. "C" counteracts paralysis and avoids dependence. The pastor/counselor pays close attention to the referred need. In short, "C" establishes achievable objectives and commits to action.

A Case Study Using the A-B-C Intervention Model

The Rivera family recently lost their home due to a 6.4 magnitude seismic event in the southern area of Puerto Rico. Even though family and friends tried to encourage them, after two weeks of residing in a shelter for the victims, Pedro Rivera, a family man, is frustrated but makes no effort to seek any help for his situation. He expressed that he will stop attending church and will stay in the shelter alone all day long. His family is concerned because of his change of character and harsh behavior toward his wife and children. His family turns to the pastor for help.

- “A” (Achieving a relationship of openness and trust). The pastor answers the family call and reaches out to the afflicted person by establishing an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy (the ability to see the world through the eyes of the afflicted one). He listens attentively to Pedro Rivera and avoids any judgment. The pastor keeps the conviction that people in crisis are able to face their crisis and move forward. As the afflicted person is heard and valued, he opens up to share with the pastor his fears, anxieties, guilt, pain, etc. The pastor does not lecture, criticize, or offer advice. He listens attentively.
- “B” (Be willing to go down to the basic components of the crisis and its emotional depth: identifying and expressing feelings). Then, the pastor works with Mr. Rivera to identify (call by its name) the predominant feelings. Mr. Rivera feels very sad (feeling) because he lost his house (matter) for which he worked long years. The matter (lost home) explains the feelings (sadness), and both together provide meaning. Now the pastor focuses on articulating with words the facts, threats, or danger that caused the crisis. This reduces anxiety, increases self-esteem, and enables Mr. Rivera to move to the next step of recovering the stability and taking control of his life.
- “C” (actively fighting/combatting). This

implies several things. First, the pastor faces the possibility that Mr. Pedro Rivera intends to take his own life or do something else that would be considered “crazy.” The pastor is not afraid to talk about death and suicide explicitly and asks straight questions in a sensitive way. “Mr. Rivera, have you thought of taking your life in the midst of this pain?” Secondly, the pastor identifies, together with others, the resources Mr. Rivera can count on (family, friends, church, community, savings, social assistance, etc.). Mr. Rivera admits, “Thank God that even though I lost my house I can count on my family ... besides, I have faith in God ... and my church.” Then achievable goals are set within a reasonable time frame, starting with the immediate needs—“Mr. Rivera, how long do you think you will be with your family in the shelter? What other options are there?” For example. The commitment to action counters the paralysis caused by crises and neutralizes dependency. Likewise, the pastor is alert to the possible need to refer the case to a professional or specialized support center when there is a danger of suicide or when the crisis has not been well processed.

Grief

The term “grief” comes from the Latin word *gravis* and is the natural emotional response to the loss of someone or something.¹⁹ *The Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* defines grief as:

The experience of losing a loved one or a cherished object. “Grief” usually describes a person’s reaction to the death of a spouse or close relative, although the term can also be used to describe other losses, such as that of a limb, a home, the experience of leaving to a faraway place, the loss of a job or a divorce. “Sorrow” is the emotion of grief; it is part of the price you have to pay for love, and it is a normal response to loss of a special person or object in our life.²⁰

The most striking thing about this definition is that it presents grief as a normal reaction to the loss of the loved person or object, and adds “that it is the price to be paid for loving...” It is those demonstrations that manifest the feeling that one has for that loved one.

Dr. Pablo Polischuk, professor and clinical psychologist, writes, “When losing a loved one, belongings or health, people experience natural reactions—physiological sensations, overwhelming negative thoughts and emotions.”²¹ Here he emphasizes not only the sense of loss, but he also mentions various physiological and psychological reactions that accompany this loss. Thus, we can also affirm that there are various factors that mediate grief, such as the relationship with the person dying,

"The grief stage is like finding yourself in a maze, looking desperately for a way out"

the type of attachment, the circumstances of death, historical background, variables of personality, social variables, and concurrent stressors.

In terms of the processes a grieving person goes through and the emotions that engulf them, Dr. Gary Collins, clinical psychologist and Christian author, says, “When a person goes through this grieving process, they experience many emotions, including regret, despair, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, anger, confusion, feelings of worthlessness and feelings of loss (as if a part of themselves has been taken away, or something inside them has died).”²² The grief stage is like finding yourself in a maze, looking desperately for a way out; it is like going through a dark and scary train tunnel without the light at the end. It is a desperate situation where the person that is going through the grief deserves all our attention and help.

William Worden was the creator of the theory of grieving tasks, where he offers a model for dealing with grief. The four tasks to elaborate a normal grief are contained in his book *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* are: “(1) Accept the reality of the loss, (2) Release the feelings and emotions that accompany the grief, (3) Enable yourself to live without the deceased, and (4) Recover interest in life and in the people who are still alive.”²³

Pastors and Christian counselors must know how to serve grieving families and how to help them in their grief recovery process, to find a new meaning for their grief, and eventually rekindle the core meaning of life. Here we will mention a basic pastoral guide to help people in the grieving process:²⁴

- Be an attentive listener. The person who has been hit by a grief needs a counselor who understands. The pastor must be wise to restrict himself/herself from doing much interpreting—especially from falling into the temptation to preach. He should concentrate on hearing not only the words, but also the subtle inflections of the voice, which often appear as deep sighs and moans that are difficult to vocalize.
- Give empathetic response. Empathetic response must be short but significant. Statements should gently remind the individual that the pastor is interested in their feelings. The one who is grieving desires a mature companion more than anything else—someone who will listen patiently to the fears, the guilt, and sometimes, the panic.
- Avoid judgmental, interpretative, and authoritative statements. Statements such as “It is God's will,” “I understand what you're going through,” “Depend on God alone,” or “Time will heal the pain” will sound as if the counselor wants to stop the process, rather than keep it going. The need to preach one more sermon to strengthen the person, or to have the last word should be set aside.
- Be willing to ask for help. When the pastor begins to understand that the grieving

person is showing signs of pathological or morbid grief, he should consult an appropriate specialist immediately.

As pastors and leaders, we must be sure we understand grief, because when someone goes through it, they experience many emotions, including regret, despair, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, anger, confusion, feelings of worthlessness, and feelings of loss. The situation is desperate and deserves all our attention and help. The intensity of the feelings of the death of a loved one usually causes a deeper and more lengthy reaction. The death of a loved one concludes the direct contact experience. Our pastoral goal is to help the mourners in the process of accepting the reality of their loss, help them expose their feelings and emotions that accompany grief, and provide support for them in the saddened process of living with the loss and rekindling interest in life.

Conclusion

Serving families during times of celebration and crises provides us with the opportunity to give a part of ourselves without expecting anything in return. The feeling is even greater when we do it intentionally and with empathy. The intentional practices of a pastoral ministry that provides support during times of celebration and crises promote restoration, growth, liberation, and empowerment to those who receive their benefits and services. Serving individuals and families during these times makes them happier, increases the sense of belonging, brings them closer to humility, increases a healthy self-esteem rather than the ego, strengthens relationships, etc.

The church also benefits because a healthy church is one whose leadership has the capacity to think critically, to adopt a holistic theology, and the ability to put into practice appropriate functions and skills for pastoral service. In turn, serving families during times of celebration and grief provides us with the opportunity to address the needs of people and opens the way for a ministry of support, healing, and growth.

Lesson Review Questions

1. Religious and family celebrations are resources that families can use to educate their children, increase and maintain their social networks, and _____.
 - a. Pass on their traditions
 - b. Recognize important events
 - c. Strengthen faith
 - d. Remember lost loved ones
2. _____ are the most important agents in the development of children.
 - a. Peers
 - b. Families
 - c. Churches
 - d. All of the above
3. Family celebrations are great places for children to develop cognitively and emotionally by allowing children to engage in conversations that help them learn to express their opinions, desires, and inquiries about certain topics. When we value those opinions, this helps increase a child's _____.
 - a. Verbal skills
 - b. Social-emotional intelligence
 - c. Self-esteem
 - d. Spatial reasoning
4. Two prominent family celebrations a pastor may be involved in include marriages and _____.
 - a. Funeral services
 - b. Child dedications
 - c. Birthdays
 - d. Child births
5. Two prominent congregational celebrations apart from celebrations of the Christian year that a pastor should be involved in include water baptism and _____.
 - a. Marriages
 - b. Drama and musical performances
 - c. Jubilee celebrations
 - d. Church membership
6. The season of the Christian calendar that celebrates the coming of Christ running from the Sunday before November 30 until Christmas Eve is called _____.
 - a. Epiphany
 - b. Lent
 - c. Pentecost
 - d. Advent
7. The feast commemorating the manifestation of God's glory through His birth, baptism, and first miracle is celebrated on the first Sunday after January 6 and is called _____.
 - a. Epiphany
 - b. Lent
 - c. Pentecost
 - d. Advent
8. When we talk about crisis, we are referring to that temporary state of disorder and disorganization usually characterized by
 - a. The individual or family's inability to solve problems using known methods and strategies

- b. The potential to generate positive or negative radical results
 - c. Both A and B
 - d. Neither A nor B
9. The crisis and its resolution will depend on a combination of factors, including both the triggering event and personal resources. Personal resources can include:
- a. Family
 - b. Culture
 - c. Religion
 - d. All of the above
10. _____ crises are unexpected crises. They present an unforeseen manifestation of stress rising out of external forces, unknown to both the individual and the family.
- a. Circumstantial
 - b. Developmental
 - c. Structural
 - d. Abandonment
11. _____ crises in a family often happen when a family structure is unable to incorporate into the new developing stage of any of its members or the family itself.
- a. Circumstantial
 - b. Developmental
 - c. Structural
 - d. Abandonment
12. _____ crises appear when dysfunctional or dependent family members are present, when the help needed is specialized or difficult to obtain, and when the family loses control of those depending on them.
- a. Circumstantial
 - b. Developmental
 - c. Structural
 - d. Abandonment
13. Frequently, this type of crisis is the result of an intention to avoid changes. These crises originate from hidden, unresolved, and underlying tense moments in the family dynamics before external forces or developmental stages.
- a. Circumstantial
 - b. Developmental
 - c. Structural
 - d. Abandonment
14. The model developed by Warren Jones to train lay personnel to serve people in crisis involves reaching a relationship of openness and trust, identifying the components of the crisis, and combating the crisis actively. This model is called the _____ model.
- a. First Pastoral Care
 - b. A-B-C
 - c. Behavioral
 - d. Family
15. _____ is a normal response to the loss of someone or something and may take months or years to process.
- a. Sadness
 - b. Grief
 - c. Rejection
 - d. Denial

Appendix A:

Covenant of Dedication

A Ceremony for Infant Dedication

Life is a stewardship. It is not your own; you have been bought with a price—the precious blood of God’s own Son. Life is, therefore, God’s gift to you. It is to be returned to Him fulfilled and glorifying to Him. The opportunities and experiences in life are experiences in stewardship and worship. We are charged to render each experience to God.

Marriage is a stewardship in which one man and one woman are joined by God to be one flesh. Marriage is returned to God as an act of divine worship when two people live their lives in such a way that they exemplify the relationship between Christ and the church.

Parenthood is a stewardship. This child which we will dedicate today is not your own. He/she belongs to God. God gave him/her life and that life will be returned to God.

- You are the keepers of this treasure.
- You are the developers of this treasure.
- You are answerable to God for the manner in which you keep and develop this treasure.
- God has given you a privilege. You have the opportunity to return to God a treasure developed to its full potential spiritually and socially.

This stewardship requires certain commitments on your part. You are not prepared to dedicate this child unless you are yourself dedicated to Christ as your Savior and Lord. You are not prepared to believe for this child unless you believe for yourself and for your salvation. Though your faith will be no substitute for this child’s personal faith, it is essential to your act of dedication and your stewardship. I will ask you in Christ’s name to affirm or to reaffirm your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

To the father: Do you now affirm that Jesus Christ is your personal Savior and Lord? (Response: I do.)

To the mother: Do you now affirm that Jesus Christ is your personal Savior and Lord? (Response: I do.)

Please respond to the following pledges of dedication with the words, “We dedicate ourselves.”

To live a life of personal faith in Jesus Christ
We dedicate ourselves

To exemplify in the home the grace of God
We dedicate ourselves

To live by the love of God demonstrated in thought, word and deed
We dedicate ourselves

To raise this child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
We dedicate ourselves

To instill in this child a love for the Word of God and faithfulness in the worship of God
We dedicate ourselves

Will the congregation please stand and share in this act of dedication? With the birth and dedication of this child, this congregation has also inherited a stewardship.

These parents standing alone are not sufficient to the vows that they have just taken. These vows and the goal of personal salvation can be fully realized in a community of faith.

You as the congregation of God are charged by God to provide a nurturing and supporting community of spiritual oversight and nurture for this child and his/her parents.

Please respond in unison to the following pledges with the words, "We dedicate ourselves."

To provide for these parents and this child a household of faith—the temple of the Holy Spirit
We dedicate ourselves

To provide for these parents and this child a sanctuary of prayer and love
We dedicate ourselves

To pray for these parents in the fulfillment of the vows which they have taken before God
We dedicate ourselves

To pray for this child that he/she come to an experience of saving faith early in life
We dedicate ourselves

To follow this child with our prayers and love throughout his/her life
We dedicate ourselves

(At this time, the minister should receive the child from the parents and offer the prayer of dedication).

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Appendix B:

Intervention of Models During Times of Crises

Behavioral Model²⁵

This model is based on Carl Slaikeu's proposal of five steps for first psychological help. These steps are: establish contact, assess the problem, look for possible solutions, initiate concrete actions, and follow-up.

- **Establish contact. The objective is to reduce affliction and control initial reactions.**

What to do:	What NOT to do:
Listen carefully	Judge or take sides
Explore feelings and actions	Ignore feelings and actions
Communicate acceptance	Rely on "own history"

- **Assess the problem. The objective is to establish immediate and later needs.**

What to do:	What NOT to do:
Ask specifically	Ask yes/no questions
Ask the person for concrete facts	Allow abstract concepts to continue
Evaluate the possibility of negative outcomes	Ignore dangerous signs

- **Find solutions. The objective is to find possible solutions.**

What to do:	What NOT to do:
Stimulate creativity	Allow a reductionist vision
Deal with obstacles	Leave obstacles unexplored
Establish priorities	Tolerate mixed needs

- **Initiate concrete actions. The objective is to motivate the person to take action.**

What to do:	What NOT to do:
Take one step at a time	Try to resolve all things at the same time
Identify short-term goals	Make long-term mandatory decisions
Confront	Abstain from responsibilities
Be direct, if necessary	

- **Follow-up. The objective is to evaluate if the purpose to help has been fulfilled.**

What to do:	What NOT to do:
Agree on a new covenant	Leave out details
Evaluate intervention stages	Assume the person will continue with the agreed action on his/her own.
Evaluate progress	Have a third party doing the evaluation

Family Model²⁶

The Family Model presented by Frank Pittman consists of seven steps. Pittman insists that every person plays a role in significant relations, which demands for the help to be directed towards the entire family group rather than the individual.

- **Take care of the emergency.** Emergency and crisis are not the same thing. There is a

willingness to attend to, but not to take care of, the whole thing. The fresher the situation, the better it is to make changes. It can be directive, even temporarily, to assume administrative functions in the family.

- **Commit the family.** Families “choose” one of their members to feel for the entire family or to change without the family changing. Involve everyone in the process of being helped, especially those who have the power to penalize, hinder, or facilitate the change and/or emotional resources and materials.
- **Define the crisis.** Every family has moments of specific tensions, depending on their values, expectations, and resources. If there are external tensions, the family unites, and the community helps to see that it’s resolved. If the tension is hidden and no one is aware of it, then the needed help is not provided, and the crisis is not resolved. This leaves a dysfunctional balance and the potential for a new crisis to rise.
- **General orientation.** As soon as the crisis has been defined, we should try to calm all moods, assign tasks that will provide support, process pain, and reflect on the situation while exploring possible options.
- **Specific orientation.** Summarize what has been heard; try not to pass judgment on anyone. Give simple and direct assessment. Put emphasis on perpetuating the family.
- **Negotiate resistance.** In general, people who are experiencing a structural crisis (a recurrent result of the internal dynamics and exacerbation in the family), present resistance to an intervention. The negotiation process of inflexibilities can be long and difficult for the pastor/counselor. A detour may be possible.
- **Finish.** With or without changes, crises end within a few weeks (its effects may or may not continue). The facilitator, along with the family, defines when his/her service has concluded. Leave the doors opened in case you are needed again.

Appendix C:

The Funeral Sermon

Preaching can be a powerful tool in providing spiritual care at the time of death and grief. A funeral sermon is given with the purpose of comforting those who have lost a loved one. This type of sermon can't deny the reality of suffering. On the contrary, the sermon needs to acknowledge and accept it; but also proclaim hope in resurrection.²⁷

Characteristics of a Funeral Sermon

Theology

A sermon given at a funeral service should be founded in the hope the gospel of Jesus Christ brings.

- **Unique.** Every person that passes away was a unique individual. Therefore, every funeral sermon should be uniquely created to honor the person who has died. For that reason, a standard, repetitive, or recycled sermon is not appropriate.
- **Brevity.** For the sake of a grieving family, keep the funeral sermon brief.
- **Clarity.** Quoting Warren Wiersbe, Scott Gibson writes, "As people walk through their valley (of death), they can't manage the abstractions in systematic theology, but can see the Biblical images that reveal a savior who cares for them and strengthens them."²⁸ The funeral sermon should be a simple declaration of hope and comfort that is found in Jesus Christ.
- **Classification of funeral sermons²⁹**
 - The biographical sermon is based on life experiences the deceased had. It is an important presentation of that life to the community.
 - The circumstantial sermon is given when the deceased passed away during unusual circumstances—like a murder, suicide, or accident.
 - The doctrinal sermon focuses its attention, not on the individual or special circumstances, but on the death experience and the problems it poses in our minds.
 - The memorial sermon. Commemorative services can be days, weeks, or even months after death. For various reasons, family members and friends do not gather immediately after death to honor the deceased. Instead they service is planned at a later time.
- What should be done when preaching a funeral sermon.
 - Establish and keep visual contact with those mourning and with the congregation.
 - Be warm, compassionate, and friendly.
 - Pay attention to body language and the tone of voice.
 - Repeat the main sermon idea at least three times.
 - Speak as if engaged in a conversation.
 - Articulate and project your voice.
 - Know the name of the deceased and the names of his/her immediate family.
 - Be sympathetic.
 - If possible, preach without notes.
 - Be brief.

Sample Sermon for a Christian Funeral³⁰

Title: COMFORTING WORDS

Bible Text: John 14:1-6

- Introduction

The physical separation of a loved one caused by death is always painful. When Jesus' crucifixion and death was near, He prepared his disciples with these words to help them with the imminent transition:

- A word of peace "Do not let your hearts be troubled" The peace of God. (So much needed during these times!)
 - Peace for the believers, Philippians 4:7.
 - Peace during trials. Jesus didn't promise an undisturbed life, exempted from struggles and conflicts. Life brings diverse trials; however, in the middle of difficulties and uneasiness, there needs to be an invulnerable place for peace in the heart.
 - It's the peace that Jesus gives. Philosophy is a way to help us understand and stoically accept grief. But only Jesus can give peace to our spirits (John 14:27). The peace the world offers depends on circumstances (These are always uncertain and brief.) Divine peace is a work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts (The world cannot give and cannot take it away.) That's the reason why Jesus could say, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," because He has the power to give peace to a troubled heart.
- A word of faith "Believe also in me."
 - It's a personal faith. It's not the faith of my church or my family, but mine. It's a subjective experience that can't be delegated. No one can believe for me, neither can I believe for someone else.
 - It's to have faith in a Person.
 - In the Messiah. (The disciples believed in God; therefore, they also believed in Jesus.)
 - In a Friend. He trusted in them and kept a sincere, continuous, and spontaneous friendship with them. (John 15:14, 15) He rejoiced with them and cried with them. He accompanied Martha and Mary in their grief. (John 11:28-37).
 - In the Son of God. He was able to say, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25, 26). He died and rose again. He ascended into heaven and intercedes for us. That's why He's worthy of our trust. Let's put our faith in Him.
 - It's faith-efficient.
 - This marks the difference from those who don't believe. Belief in Christ allows believers to face adversity with courage.
 - It doesn't exclude sadness. Jesus was also sad (Matthew 26:38); it's something natural and human. But even when you are sad, you don't despair; instead, you are confident.
- A word of hope "I am going there to prepare a place for you."
 - Hope in heaven. There will be homes prepared for those who are ready. Paul was confident that when he left his body, he would "be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23).
 - Hope in eternity.
 - The dead will resurrect. When Christ comes again, He will bring with him those who died believing in him (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14).
 - In eternal life. Those who are still alive at that moment, will join them and be with Christ forever (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). This is our surest hope, and it should be comforting (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

- Conclusion

Jesus came to make God known to us. Jesus told His disciples that He would be absent, that He would die and go back to His father in heaven. However, He made a way through Himself (John 14:6) for all who believe in Jesus. We too can have fellowship with God, experience peace, and know that we will have a life forever with Him in heaven ...

Contributed by Víctor Jesús Cabrera

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