

The Beyond Disaster Toolkit

Dear Church Leaders, Caregivers, and First Responders,

Welcome to the *Beyond Disaster* toolkit, a set of resources for providing spiritual care to adults, teens, and children in crisis. Thank you for serving your Ukrainian brothers and sisters.

In times of displacement like this, hurting people need gentle reminders on how best to cope during their suffering. *While emotional and physical wounds are so fresh, it is premature to conduct counseling sessions or healing groups.*

Spiritual first aid helps people recognize common spiritual and emotional reactions to disasters. Like physical first aid, it is intended to start an ongoing process of care.

Your most important tool

Your own presence is needed most. A comforting presence helps people feel cared for and valued. It is your most important tool in caring for those overwhelmed by their losses. Food, clothing, and a warm place to sleep are critical, but human connection reminds us that we are alive and that we matter.

The scope of the need can be overwhelming. *Beyond Disaster* resources let you offer tangible early support to survivors until you have more capacity. They can also support you as caregivers.

As you embody God's presence with those who are hurting, conversations may turn to spiritual matters and the experience of trauma. You may feel anxious about what to say. Sometimes, nothing needs to be said. Sometimes, a person simply needs to lament what was lost, just as Jesus did in his great suffering on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

What is in this toolkit?

When the time is right to invite others to talk more about their experiences, the items in this toolkit may help you. They are designed to guide conversations about the experience of trauma and of voicing complaints to God. They also provide simple and practical suggestions to comfort and calm ourselves. Take time to familiarize yourself with each item and how you might best use it with others. You can download digital copies and find more information at the website [BeyondDisaster.Bible](https://www.beyonddisaster.org)

Resources for survivors

Beyond Disaster Postcard	Normalizes responses to traumatic events. Includes a simple list of ways to care for self and others and a reminder of God's presence.
Beyond Disaster: A Survivor's Guide for Spiritual First Aid	A booklet with six small sections designed to help an individual or group consider the effects of trauma, how to calm strong emotions, how to begin to recover, and how relate to God. Each section has questions for reflection, verses to read, and simple activities to try together or alone.
Unstuck: A Teen Guide for Living in Uncertain Times	Four lessons for teens to do with other teens and a caring adult. Each lesson begins with a story that helps teens explore their feelings, express their pain, and connect with a character in the Bible with similar hardships. Activities and discussion questions help teenagers go deeper in connecting with others and expressing their pain to God.
God Is With Me: A Family Guide for Living in Hard Times	Four lessons to use with younger children (ages 8–12) to help them discuss in a safe way what they are experiencing. Each lesson starts with a story and contains discussion questions, short and relatable Bible stories, and games and activities to do as a family or in a group.

Resources for caregivers

Using Beyond Disaster with Small Groups	A short guide for those leading groups using <i>Beyond Disaster</i> booklet. Provides best practices for small groups and additional advice for each lesson.
Training Disaster Responders	On the BeyondDisaster.Bible website is a link to a brief video series (in English) to orient and support those who care for survivors using the <i>Beyond Disaster</i> booklet. Practical tips and tools will help you care for yourself and avoid burnout.

Prepare to serve wisely

People want to help after a disaster because they see the need and care about others. Compassionate people may be tempted to do too much and not take care of themselves.

Be aware of dangers caregivers face.

- **Being overloaded:** You may have too many tasks and not feel like you have time for the rest your body needs. If you are running on adrenaline all the time, you will wear your body out. You may become exhausted and unable to function.
- **Trauma and secondary trauma:** You may experience trauma firsthand and find yourself behaving differently: reliving the experience, avoiding things that remind you of the trauma, and being on alert all the time. In addition, if you listen to people telling you about their traumatic experiences, you can experience “secondary” trauma and have the same reactions. This can be as overwhelming as firsthand trauma.
- **Moral dilemmas:** You may have to make hard decisions where there are no good options. You may be forced to do what you consider wrong, or not be able to do what you think is right. You may not be able to stop the wrong you see. You may want to help, but not be able to. You may realize that your group is actually doing harm. You may feel guilty that you survived while others did not. All these things can wound your soul and wear you down.

Just as a phone needs to be charged regularly to be useful, you need to watch your own reactions and your energy levels. Accept human limitations and set boundaries to avoid exhaustion. Set a reasonable schedule with regular short breaks.

Care for caregivers

Like everyone, you have a body, a heart, a mind, and a soul. If one part is wounded, your whole person suffers. By caring for your own needs, you are better able to offer comfort, aid, and hope to others. Even Jesus rested, and encouraged his disciples to rest (Mark 6:30–32).

Take steps to apply to yourself what you know to do for others. The healing tools in the *Beyond Disaster* booklet are also for you. The Container Exercise is often helpful for caregivers. Please don't forget to seek beauty and rest to counter the trauma around you.

Connect with God daily

God also cares for the caregiver! Schedule a personal daily check-in where you can turn your attention to God. Read a passage of Scripture. In God's presence, review the past 24 hours, considering which experiences made you feel good, and which made you feel bad. Did you experience loss or suffering? Did you experience beauty or joy? Choose one thing that stands out and pray about it—either a prayer of praise, request, or lament. You can do this by yourself or with other caregivers or fellow believers.

The Trauma Healing Institute

“I will bless those who trust me. They will be like trees growing beside a stream—trees with roots that reach down to the water, and with leaves that are always green. They bear fruit every year and are never worried by a lack of rain.” Jeremiah 17:7–8 CEV