

LIVING CHRISTIANLY: EQUIPPING LEADERS FOR CLINICALLY INFORMED SOUL CARE

Learning to Hear, Listening to Understand, & Guiding a Wise Response
Understanding and Responding to Depression with Grace, Truth, and Wisdom
Living Christianly Care & Grow Groups — Leadership Formation Series

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

People rarely come to us and say, "I think I'm depressed." Instead, they tell a story. They may talk about feeling exhausted, discouraged, overwhelmed, lonely, or stuck. As Soul Care leaders, one of the most important skills we can develop is learning to hear what may be beneath the story being shared and responding in ways that help people feel understood, supported, and connected.

In today's workshop, we will explore common signs of depression and learn how these struggles often emerge in everyday conversations. We will practice three essential Soul Care skills:

- ✓ **Learning to Hear** signs of depression hidden within a person's story.
"To answer before listening— that is folly and shame." (Proverbs 18:13 NIV)
- ✓ **Listening to Understand** through reflective listening that communicates compassion, validation, and understanding.
"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out." (Proverbs 20:5 NIV)
- ✓ **Guiding a Wise Response** by helping individuals identify what they are feeling, anchor themselves in truth, and discern wise, realistic next steps that move them toward greater health and well-being.
"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17 NIV)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize common signs and symptoms of depression.
- ✓ Listen for emotional, behavioral, and spiritual clues hidden within a person's story.
- ✓ Use reflective listening to communicate understanding and compassion.
- ✓ Apply the Whole Soul Flow process to help individuals identify:
 - What they are feeling – God draws near in our pain.
"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18
 - What is true about their situation – God anchors us in truth.
"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17
 - One healthy next step
"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6

What to Expect

In this workshop, you will:

1. Learn how to hear signs of depression in everyday conversations.
2. Practice reflective listening to help people feel heard and understood.
3. Explore how the Whole Soul Flow framework can move people from overwhelm toward hope and wise action.
4. Work through a sample vignette together using the Whole Soul Flow process.
5. Practice with a partner using realistic ministry scenarios.
6. Discuss what we learned and how to apply these skills in future ministry conversations.

The goal is not to become a counselor. The goal is to become a compassionate presence who can recognize signs of distress, listen with understanding, and offer meaningful Soul Care in everyday ministry conversations.

PART I: LEARNING TO HEAR, LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND DEPRESSION

Depression Has Many Faces

When most people think of depression, they picture someone who is very sad, crying, or unable to get out of bed. While depression can look like that, many people continue working, attending church, caring for their families, and serving others while struggling internally. Because of this, people rarely say: "I think I'm depressed." Instead, they tell a story. They may talk about being exhausted, overwhelmed, discouraged, lonely, stuck, or struggling to enjoy things they once loved.

As Soul Care leaders, one of the most important skills we can develop is learning to hear what may be underneath the story being shared. When we recognize signs of emotional distress, we are better equipped to respond with wisdom, compassion, and support. Our goal is not to diagnose depression. Our goal is to learn to hear possible signs of depression so we can better care for the people God places in front of us.

Common Signs of Depression

Sign	What Someone Might Say
Fatigue	"I'm tired all the time."
Loss of Interest	"I don't enjoy things like I used to."
Discouragement	"Nothing seems to be getting better."
Hopelessness	"I don't think anything is ever going to change."
Feeling Stuck	"I don't know what's wrong with me."
Isolation	"I just want to be left alone."
Worthlessness	"I feel like I'm failing everyone."
Overwhelm	"Everything feels like too much right now."

What Are You Hearing?

When someone shares their story, listen for the emotions, struggles, and symptoms hidden within their words.

Example

Someone might say to you:

"I've been taking care of my sick mother, working overtime, and trying to keep everything together."

Words that describe the person's underlying feelings are:

- Exhaustion
- Overwhelm
- Discouragement
- Isolation
- Hopelessness

Learning to hear the symptoms beneath the story helps us know how to respond and support the person in front of us.

Reflective Listening

Once we begin to hear what may be underneath a person's story, the next step is helping them feel understood. Reflective listening is the practice of listening carefully and reflecting back the emotions, concerns, and experiences you hear. Rather than rushing to give advice or solve the problem, reflective listening helps people slow down, organize what they are experiencing, and feel less alone in their struggle.

Reflective listening communicates:

- "I hear you."
- "I understand."
- "You are not alone."

Reflective Listening Examples

What They Say	Reflective Listening Response
"I'm exhausted all the time."	"It sounds like you've been carrying a lot and are feeling completely drained."
"Nothing seems to be getting better."	"It sounds like you're feeling discouraged because things aren't changing the way you hoped."
"I just feel stuck."	"It sounds like you're wanting things to change but aren't sure what to do next."
"I feel like I'm failing everyone."	"It sounds like you're carrying a lot of pressure and feeling discouraged about how things are going."
"Everything feels like too much right now."	"It sounds like you've been overwhelmed by everything you've been carrying."

People often feel less overwhelmed when they hear their thoughts and emotions reflected back to them. As they begin to sort through what they are experiencing, they are often better able to recognize what they are feeling, consider what is true, and identify a wise next step.

Remember: Reflective listening is not about fixing the problem, agreeing with every conclusion, or having the right answer. It is about helping people feel understood so they can begin to think more clearly and move toward truth and wise action.

PART II: GUIDING A WISE RESPONSE

Hearing a person's story is an important first step, but it is not the final step. Once people feel heard and understood, they are often better able to begin processing what they are experiencing. Many people come to us feeling overwhelmed by their emotions, circumstances, responsibilities, or relationships. They know they are struggling, but they are not always sure what they are feeling, what is true about their situation, or what to do next.

The **Whole Soul Flow** provides a simple framework for guiding these conversations. Rather than trying to solve the person's problem, the process helps people slow down, organize what they are experiencing, consider what is true, and identify one wise response.

The goal is not to solve the person's problem. The goal is to help them:

- ✓ **Acknowledge what they are feeling with grace.**
- ✓ **Discern what is true about their situation and what is within their control.**
- ✓ **Identify one wise and realistic next step.**

The Whole Soul Flow helps people move from emotional overwhelm toward thoughtful and faithful action by asking: "**Given what I feel and what is true, what would be a wise response?**"

Grace Space	Truth Root	Whole Soul Response
What am I feeling?	What is true, factual, and within my control?	Given what I feel and what is true, how should I respond?

The Whole Soul Flow does not ask people to ignore their feelings, nor does it encourage them to be led by them. Instead, it invites them to acknowledge their experiences with grace, anchor themselves in truth, and choose wise responses that move them toward greater health, hope, and faithfulness.

A more detailed explanation of the Whole Soul Flow process can be found in the Whole Soul Flow Pocket Guide included in your packet.

PRACTICE USING THE WHOLE SOUL FLOW TOOL

Below are three vignettes designed to help you practice identifying feelings, facts, Scripture truths, and possible Whole Soul Flow Response(s). Use the Whole Soul Flow Table, and the questions and prompts within the table to complete this exercise.

The goal of the Whole Soul Flow tool is to slow down, listen carefully, and help people move from overwhelm toward greater clarity, hope, and wise action.

Vignette: Caring for Others and Running on Empty

For the past several months, I have been helping care for my mother who has been dealing with serious health issues. Between taking her to appointments, helping around her house, and trying to keep up with my responsibilities at home, I feel like I am constantly running from one thing to the next. I still go to work every day, but lately I have felt exhausted all the time. Even when I get a chance to rest, I don't feel refreshed. I used to enjoy spending time with friends and serving at church, but lately I just don't have the energy. Most days I would rather stay home by myself.

Honestly, I have been feeling pretty discouraged. It seems like no matter how hard I try, there is always something else that needs my attention. I keep telling myself that I should be able to handle it, but lately I feel overwhelmed and don't know how much longer I can keep going. I haven't really talked to anyone about it because everyone else seems busy too. Sometimes I feel alone in all of this. I know God is with me, but lately I just feel stuck and unsure of what to do next.

Grace Space	Truth Root	Whole Soul Response
➤ What feelings did you hear? ➤ Create a reflective listening statement using the feelings you heard.	➤ "What facts did you hear?" ➤ Create reflective listening statements using the facts you heard.	➤ Given what the feelings and facts identified, what might be one healthy next step? ➤ Remember: The goal is to identify one realistic next step that moves the person toward greater health, support, wisdom, or connection. ➤ Is there a Bible verse or Scripture truth that you would share?

Vignette: Carrying the Weight of Uncertainty

For the past several years, I have been trying to build a life for my family here in the United States. Lately, there has been a lot of discussion about immigration and deportation, and it has been difficult not knowing what the future may hold. At first, I tried to stay positive and focus on what I could control, but over time I have started feeling worn down. I feel tired most days, even when I get enough sleep. It seems like I am always carrying a heavy weight that never really goes away. I used to enjoy spending time with friends, attending church events, and being involved in activities with my family. Lately, I just don't have the energy or motivation. Most of the time I go to work, come home, and keep to myself.

Honestly, I have been feeling discouraged. Sometimes it feels like no matter how hard I work, I am unable to move forward. I know there are things to be thankful for, but lately I have felt stuck and unsure about what the future holds. I don't talk about it very much because I don't want to worry my family. Most people don't really understand what it is like to carry this kind of uncertainty every day. Sometimes I feel very alone in it.

Grace Space	Truth Root	Whole Soul Response
➤ What feelings did you hear? ➤ Create a reflective listening statement using the feelings you heard.	➤ "What facts did you hear?" ➤ Create reflective listening statements using the facts you heard.	➤ Given what the feelings and facts identified, what might be one healthy next step? ➤ Remember: The goal is to identify one realistic next step that moves the person toward greater health, support, wisdom, or connection. ➤ Is there a Bible verse or Scripture truth that you would share?

Vignette: Watching Someone You Love Struggle

My son is in his late twenties, and for the past several years he has struggled with substance use. There have been periods when things seemed to improve, but then something happens and he falls back into old patterns. I spend a lot of time worrying about him and wondering if he is safe. Sometimes I feel like I'm waiting for the next phone call or crisis. I have tried helping him, giving advice, setting boundaries, and praying for him, but nothing seems to make a lasting difference. Lately, I have been feeling exhausted. I still go to work and take care of my responsibilities, but I don't have much energy left for anything else. The things I used to enjoy don't seem as important anymore.

Honestly, I have been feeling discouraged. Sometimes I wonder if anything will ever change. I know I need to trust God, but some days I feel stuck and don't know what else to do. I don't talk about it very often because I don't want people to judge him or my family. Most of the time I carry it by myself, and it can feel very lonely.

Grace Space	Truth Root	Whole Soul Response
➤ What feelings did you hear? ➤ Create a reflective listening statement using the feelings you heard.	➤ "What facts did you hear?" ➤ Create reflective listening statements using the facts you heard.	➤ Given what the feelings and facts identified, what might be one healthy next step? ➤ Remember: The goal is to identify one realistic next step that moves the person toward greater health, support, wisdom, or connection. ➤ Is there a Bible verse or Scripture truth that you would share?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Remember, people rarely come to us asking for help with depression. More often, they come carrying a story. They may describe feeling tired, discouraged, overwhelmed, lonely, stuck, or uncertain about what to do next. As Soul Care leaders, our role is not to diagnose, fix, or carry another person's burden for them. Our role is to listen well, seek to understand what may be happening beneath the surface, and walk alongside others with grace, truth, and wisdom.

When people feel heard, understood, and supported, they are often better able to recognize what they are feeling, consider what is true about their situation, and identify a wise next step.

As you continue serving others, remember the simple process we practiced today:

Learning to Hear

- ✓ Hear the story.
- ✓ Listen for what may be beneath the surface.

Listening to Understand

- ✓ Reflect understanding and compassion.
- ✓ Help the person identify what they are feeling.

Guiding a Wise Response

- ✓ Help them consider what is true.
- ✓ Encourage one wise and realistic next step.
- ✓ Refer when additional support is needed.

You do not have to have all the answers. Often, the greatest gift you can offer is your presence—a listening ear, a compassionate heart, and the willingness to walk alongside someone as they take their next step toward hope.

"Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Chris." — Galatians 6:2