

Mercy Seat Counselling

Supporting people making a response at the mercy seat

Training Course



The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory

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Introduction

Introduction

It's great that you are reading this. There is no greater privilege than helping someone who is seeking God. The goal of this course is to prepare you so that you are equipped and confident to help them well.

The course is designed around helping a person coming forward for prayer at 'the mercy seat', hence the name 'mercy seat counselling'. We'll look at the origins and significance of the 'mercy seat', discuss the reasons people come forward and how different responses require different approaches. Then after a bit of practice, we'll look at a few other general things we think you should know.

We recognise that some leaders may call people forward to receive prayer through the laying on of hands (for example, on an Alpha weekend). We've included a section on 'signs and wonders', if this is relevant in your setting.

You don't need to be an officer, or a super-Christian to be a mercy seat counsellor. You just need to be willing to be used by God to help someone seeking him. But there are some pitfalls we want you to avoid, and some techniques we want to give you to increase your effectiveness. Remember though that this is God's work – we are merely being his hands.

The Salvation Army has a series of Orders and Regulations for local officers, including an entire chapter (2) on penitent form work. We recommend you read it as it includes information not covered on this course.

Please don't just read the material (it's a course, not a book). The course is designed to encourage discussion, with questions to which there will hopefully be a variety of responses. Often there are no 'right' answers, so please join in.

Enjoy the course. We pray that God will really use you in this important ministry.

SECTION 1

Why a 'Mercy Seat'?

1. To get started, please introduce yourselves, then share:
 - a) your experience (if any) in mercy seat counselling
 - b) what has led to you doing this course
 - c) what you are hoping to learn.

THE MERCY SEAT

The mercy seat is the place at the front of most Salvation Army *chapels* for people to pray at, typically during a service in response to a call from the leader. Traditionally, people have knelt at the mercy seat, but it is common now for people to stand.

During the great awakening, the standard method of asking people to respond after a sermon was for them to speak privately with the preacher after the service. In Britain in the late 1700s, John Wesley invited people to respond by calling them to a bench or seat at the front of the church. This mourner's bench or anxious seat was a forerunner of the Army's penitent form or mercy seat. In 1846, the Methodist evangelist James Caughey used the mourner's bench when preaching in Nottingham. One of the young lads to respond to God that night was a certain William Booth. From an early age, Booth was convinced of the benefit of calling people to public decision. *The Mercy Seat revisited (Nigel Bovey)*

2. What are the benefits of having a place for people to come forward to and pray?
3. What barriers – physical, emotional and spiritual – are there to mercy-seat use? How can these be overcome?
4. The mercy seat is also sometimes referred to as the penitent form. What difference in emphasis, if any, is there between these two terms?

5. Most Salvation Army chapels also have a *holiness table*. How does the holiness table differ from the mercy seat, and is this distinction helpful? Do people in your corps understand the difference?

Did you know that the mercy seat is a Biblical concept? The term mercy seat comes from the Hebrew word “kapporeth”, which means “covering”. The Ark of the Covenant was an ornate wooden box overlaid with pure gold that contained the stone tablets on which the 10 commandments were inscribed. It was placed in the most holy place of the temple and it was there, above the cover that God met with Moses. Early translations such as The King James Version refer to the lid of the box as the *mercy seat*, while more recent translations such as the New International Version tend to refer to it as the *place of atonement* (see 1 Chronicles 28:11, Exodus 25:11).

6. Why do you think the term *mercy seat* was chosen by early Salvationists?

THE MERCY SEAT COUNSELLOR

7. What do you see as the role of a mercy seat counsellor?
8. What qualities do you think a mercy seat counsellor needs? Rate each of the following qualities as essential, useful or largely irrelevant:

FAITH IN GOD	KNOWLEDGE OF THE BIBLE
ABILITY TO RELATE WELL TO OTHERS	SENSITIVITY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT
GOOD PERSONAL HYGIENE	OFFICER TRAINING
EMPATHY	AVAILABILITY FOR FOLLOW UP
THEOLOGY DEGREE	TACT
CONFIDENTIALITY	COUNSELLING QUALIFICATION
KNOWING THE INDIVIDUAL	GOOD HEARING

Ralph Pearce tells the story of a dear retired officer who was the cause of many people not going to the altar. She was a little deaf and inclined to speak very loudly at the mercy seat, once crying out ‘You did what?’ just as the congregation ended singing the prayer chorus.

Summary

The mercy seat is a place where people can come and kneel or stand to pray. We believe that public responses tend to be more lasting than private ones (but not exclusively so!). They provide an event that can be remembered and an opportunity for support and counsel.

We call those who come to the mercy seat ‘seekers’, because they come looking for something. Most people come to the mercy seat to *meet with* God. Some people also come to the mercy seat to *meet* God, by coming to Him for the first time.

The main requirement for being a mercy seat counsellor is that you have a vibrant faith (you can’t commend what you don’t have), and a genuine desire to support the other person. We are not professional counsellors. Instead we refer people to counsellors if this is needed. Our only authority comes from the Bible.

Our role involves three things:

- Helping bear other’s burdens through prayer
- Guiding people into acceptance of God’s promises for their lives through personalising Scripture
- When necessary, referring those in certain need to the officer or a source of professional help.



What is the main thing you want to remember from this session?

SECTION 2

A Mercy Seat Counselling Process

WHO COUNSELS WHO?

1. The corps officer has preached a compelling sermon and asked for a response. Several people come forward to the mercy seat. Who counsels who?

There are two things that need to happen before approaching a seeker:



Prayer: seek God's help, guidance and strength. How much you pray reflects how much you feel you need to rely on God, versus whether you think you can operate 'in your own strength'. Prayer also involves listening and being sensitive to God's spirit.



Decide who is best to counsel: consider carefully who is the best person to minister to the person's needs. When at all possible:

- counsel seekers of your own gender, and of a similar age or younger. If this is not possible, counsel in pairs
 - consider whether there is someone more qualified to help the seeker and if so, let them make use of the relationship (e.g. a small group leader, someone who has provided counsel to them in the past, etc.)
 - children's and youth ministry leaders should counsel young people
 - allow a more experienced counsellor to approach someone who is known to struggle with severe emotional issues.
2. What are the different reasons people come forward for prayer? Do different reasons require different counselling approaches? Are there some things that are common?

Once you have made the decision to counsel a particular seeker, your counselling time will typically have a start, a time of counsel, and a close, with subsequent follow-up. These steps are defined in more detail below.

1. START

You only have one chance to make a first impression. The objective of the start phase is to introduce yourself, check that the person wants someone (and you) to pray with them, and to find out what support (if any) they would like.



We suggest the following steps:

1. **Silent prayer:** before talking to the seeker, pray silently for guidance and wisdom in dealing with their needs.
2. **Introductions** (if necessary): gently introduce yourself and find out the seeker's name so that you can pray for them by name.
3. **Permission** (would they like support?): people come to the mercy seat for many reasons and we must never force ourselves on anyone. They may have someone they particularly wish to pray with, or simply prefer to be on their own, so we need to give them the choice. If they wish to be on their own, tell them you will pray for them silently. If they have someone they would prefer to speak with, go and find them.
4. **Ask** (why is the seeker here?): ask if the seeker has a particular need or request about which the two of you can pray.
5. **Listening** (hearing the seeker's felt need): it is important to allow the seeker time to share their need. Resist the urge to talk too much. Most of your talking at this stage should be in the form of clarifying questions. Be careful not to mask your own opinion in the form of questions (e.g. "don't you think you need to trust God more?"). Ask only what will help you and the seeker understand their situation better. This in turn will build trust in the relationship.



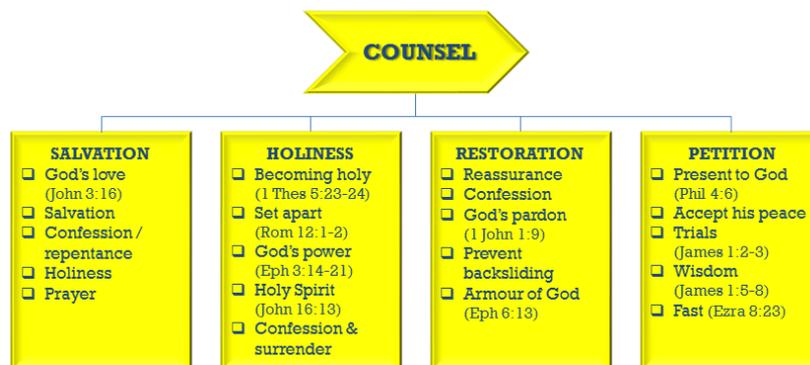
In pairs, assign one person to be the seeker and the other the counsellor.

Without telling the counsellor, the seeker thinks up a scenario (e.g. first time seeker, issue at work, committed crime, etc.) and whether or not they want someone to pray with them. The counsellor then comes to talk, following a script similar to above.

Debrief; then swap over.

2. MIDDLE – PROVIDE RELEVANT SUPPORT

Once you understand what the person is seeking, you can provide relevant support. People typically come to the mercy seat for one of these reasons:



- Salvation – first time seeker
- Holiness – total commitment and surrender
- Restoration – renewing a right relationship with God (e.g. if you have backslidden or sinned)
- Petition – for example, facing a difficult situation.

Suggestions for how to help each type of seeker follow.

Remember, your authority comes from the Word of God, so a key part of helping the person will be to highlight verses that apply to their situation. The quick reference guide and appendices A1 and A2 contain suggestions on how to personalise scripture and some useful scripture references.

A. Counselling first-time seekers

- Emphasise God's love (John 3:16)
- Outline the way of salvation (e.g. refer Appendix A3)
 - Humanity's sin
 - Sin's penalty
 - God's provision
 - Our response – faith, repentance and holiness
- Invite confession and repentance
- Consolidate through prayer

B. Counselling for holiness (total commitment and surrender)

God wants every Christian to experience living a holy life. This is the work of His Spirit – as we surrender more to Him each day we become more like Jesus.

- Discuss sanctification (becoming holy – 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).
- Emphasise the need to be pure and set apart (Romans 12:1-2).
- Emphasise God's power (Matthew 28:18) and His promise to give us this power to do more than we could imagine (Ephesians 3:14-21).

4. Emphasise the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).
5. Invite confession and surrender. Pray for the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

C. Counselling for restoration (backsliding, sin – renewing a right relationship with God)

When someone is looking for restoration, don't probe or force a confession if they are clearly uncomfortable offering it. Any confession must be treated in confidence and the seeker may need to speak with an officer.

1. Reassure them God still loves them even though they may have sinned, and wants restoration (e.g. Peter's denial and restoration John 18:15-18; 21:15-17).
2. Point out the need to confess their sin and seek forgiveness.
3. Assure them of God's pardon of what they have confessed (I John 1:9) and of God's (and your) unconditional acceptance.
4. Encourage use of "the Armour of God" (Ephesians 6:13) and spiritual disciplines to prevent further backsliding.
5. Emphasise the importance of faith (Hebrews 11, SA Doctrine 8-9)

D. Petition

1. Present your petition to God and accept his peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
2. Facing trials? You will never be tempted beyond what you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Is this to develop your perseverance? (James 1:2-3)
3. Need wisdom? (James 1:5-8)
4. Consider fasting (Ezra 8:23) (but God is not a vending machine).



Refer to the quick reference guide handout. Then in pairs, practice these scenarios. Each person should have two turns at being a seeker and two turns at being the counsellor:

1. Someone coming to pray for salvation
2. A teenager who is trying to live for Jesus, but really wants to take their faith to a new level
3. Someone who has been involved with pornography
4. Someone who is struggling with depression and is sick of it.

In the interest of time, assume that the seeker has already agreed for you to pray with them.

Have a short debrief after each one before swapping roles.

COUNSELLING CHILDREN AND TEENS

In general, the process you use to counsel children and teenagers will be the same as counselling adults. However, if you don't get on with kids, perhaps find someone else to counsel them.

Children can be worried about things which to us are of minor importance but to them are deeply troubling. Be sensitive and encouraging – never dismissive.

With children, you need to keep things simple, don't rush the process and keep checking that the child understands. In keeping things simple, don't use phrases like "ask Jesus into your heart." Young children take things literally, and they will not understand.

Be aware that young people may come from dysfunctional families or be the subject of abuse. Unless you are professionally trained in these areas, it would be wise to pass these problems on to those who are.

In dealing with teens, you may need to initiate the conversation. Be prepared to ask tough questions as they live in tough circumstances.

If teens make a commitment to Christ with your guidance, be prepared to be available for future help and support.

3. CLOSE

When you have finished hearing the need and sharing God's promises, ask for permission to pray with the seeker. Invite the seeker to pray first. Encourage them by sharing that God does not care how flashy their prayer is, only that they speak their heart.

If the seeker still does not feel comfortable praying out loud, invite them to pray silently. Tell them that after a moment you would like to close by praying (out loud) for them.

Sometimes it may not be wise, or comfortable, to spend too long at the mercy seat. If you feel that the seeker needs immediate further counselling, or you sense you are holding up the congregation, suggest to the seeker that you move to another room. This also provides a good opportunity to get help from your officer or a more experienced counsellor if you need it.

If the seeker has admitted sin that has hurt other people, it may be appropriate to discuss restitution.



To remain in close fellowship with God, you need to talk with him, so a good way to close your time is to encourage the seeker in their spiritual disciplines. Encourage them to talk to God regularly throughout their day, and to set aside time to read their Bible, and promise to be in contact with them later to see how they are getting on.

If you did not know the seeker beforehand, you will need to collect contact information from the seeker to enable follow-up, and for recording in the seeker register.

4. FOLLOW-UP

Make Contact

Your counselling time shouldn't finish at the mercy seat. You should follow up each seeker, such as by:

- phone
- visitation
- letter or card
- greeting them next time you see them at the Corps
- being available



7. Why is it important to follow up with all seekers?
8. If you were the seeker, when would you want to be contacted? Can you be too soon or too late?

Discipling

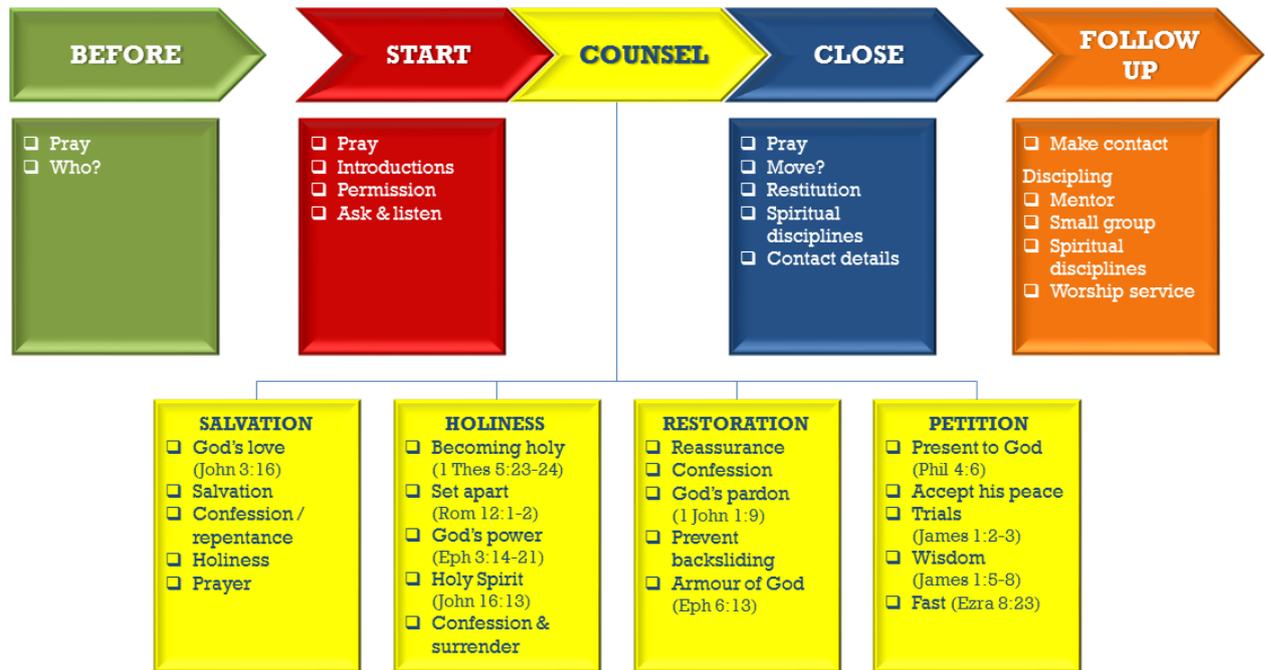
9. What does a seeker need to help them grow as a disciple of Jesus? How can you help with this?

Some of the things we think a seeker needs are ...

- Personal spiritual practices (e.g. prayer, Bible reading)
- Relationships and accountability – a mentor/buddy and a small group
- Discipleship training – for example, new believer classes
- Corporate worship

Summary

A potential process for mercy seat counselling is:



What is the main thing you want to remember from this session?

SECTION 3

What else?

Here is a collection of some other things to be aware of.

1. NO DISTRACTIONS (OR ATTRACTIONS)

1. How might your appearance or personal grooming affect the counselling relationship?

There are lots of things counsellors might do that may inadvertently distract (or attract) the seeker. Some are obvious; others more subtle.

It's pretty hard to concentrate when the person next to you smells. Watch for body odour and bad breath, but excessive perfume, after shave or deodorant can also be offensive. Consider keeping a packet of mints in your pocket.

Be careful how you dress. Consider what will happen when you kneel next to someone. Will your top or skirt reveal more than is appropriate?

Some people are huggers, but many are not. Putting your arm around someone may make them uncomfortable, so this should be avoided.

If helping the person meet with God is your top priority, you will be happy to dress modestly and be careful with your grooming for the occasion.

2. WE CANNOT 'FIX' THEIR PROBLEMS

2. When people come to the altar with serious issues and problems, we can easily fall into a 'fix it mentality'. Why do we do this, and what are some of the dangers of this approach?

Some traps we fall into include:

- a) Trying to take away their problems. When we attempt to 'fix' their problems, we may actually be feeding a deeper problem.
- b) Giving pat, 'band-aid' answers like "Jesus will make it better," "God will supply your needs," or "If you have faith, the problem will vanish". These answers only trivialise their pain and suffering, and you won't find any Scripture references that promise God's people a life without suffering. He instead promises his presence in the midst of the pain (e.g. 2 Cor 12:1-10).

- c) We try to take the place of professional counsellors. There is a fine line between offering friendly encouragement or advice in a time of need and giving psychological counsel that we are not qualified to give. People will trust you in your position as a counsellor; but without professional training, your advice could actually do more damage than good.

If someone at the altar is dealing with a particularly difficult issue, or you become involved with a seeker who confesses to gross moral breakdowns or illegal activities, you should call the officer to help with the situation. In some cases, the officer may need to refer the seeker to professional help.

Our authority comes from God's word. If God's Word says it then we can help the seeker claim it. But matters that are not explicitly dealt with in God's word are typically best left to professionals.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

3. Is it ever appropriate to pass on information shared with you at the mercy seat?

In order to insure that the mercy seat is a safe place for confession and struggle, we must keep everything told us there in the strictest confidence.

If you feel that it would be useful to share a need with others (e.g. as a prayer request, to refer the seeker for help, etc.), first obtain the seeker's permission.

The only exception to this is where you believe a person's safety or the safety of others is more important than confidentiality. At these times, you must contact your officer to address the issue.

4. AVOID CLICHÉS AND "CHRISTIAN-ESE".

One of the best ways to confuse or offend someone at the altar is to use an expression that person does not understand. Do not assume that the person knows the meaning of phrases like "Why not plunge in the blood of the lamb," or "Let us now approach the throne of grace." Also avoid pat, unexplained answers like "just believe," and "surrender all".

4. What other clichés can you think of that we sometimes use?

5. LISTEN

The time at the altar is not about you, so do not put yourself, your experience and your opinions at the centre of the conversation. Instead, ask questions and listen actively. This not only helps clear up possible miscommunications but also gives the seeker a better chance to clarify their needs to themselves.

If you listen intently, you will also build credibility such that the seeker will be more likely to listen should it be appropriate to offer advice later.

6. FOLLOW THROUGH

If during counselling, you offer some form of assistance (e.g. a Bible, new believer resources, to call later in the week), it is critical that you follow through. Integrity and consistency are essential as a witness to the seeker.

You may on occasion consider giving of your own personal resources to help someone. This sort of thing (particularly with money) should be done with great discernment (especially if you do not know the person). As a general rule, it is better to think things through and seek wise counsel before making any promise of time or resources.

7. DO NOT TRY TO FORCE COMMUNICATION OR ANSWERS.

The importance of the altar is that it provides a safe place for people to meet with God. Trying to force someone to talk about or admit to something before they are ready will compromise that safety. It is alright to ask for information once, but respect the privacy of those who do not wish to talk about details. It is enough that God knows their heart.

Do not pry or try to force a confession. Confessions are for God to hear.

Summary

Your time at the altar is to help the seeker meet with God. Ask questions, listen intently and offer advice sparingly, instead taking your authority from the Bible.



What is the main thing you want to remember from this session?

SECTION 4

Signs and Wonders

In the New Testament, the proclamation of the gospel almost always went hand in hand with a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus taught in synagogues, preached the good news, cast out demons and healed the sick and commanded his disciples to do likewise. Signs and wonders were also a central part of Paul's proclamation of the gospel (e.g. Romans 15:18-19).

Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that these gifts will cease at the end of the apostolic age. On the contrary, Paul says that these will only cease when 'perfection comes' (1 Cor 13:10) and that this 'perfection' will only occur when Jesus returns and these gifts are no longer required.

1. What experiences do people have of the supernatural display of the Holy Spirit and do you think such experiences are helpful?
2. Do you think we should expect to see the supernatural display of the Holy Spirit as part of God's kingdom activity today?
3. What do you see as the point of any supernatural signs and wonders?

Jesus told his disciples that 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you' (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost, the promise of Jesus was fulfilled and 'all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them' (Acts 2:4).

However, it did not end there. Later on we read of Peter being 'filled with the Spirit' again to preach with boldness (Acts 4:8) and then a short time later, of the disciples (including Peter) praying again for boldness and for signs and wonders to point people towards Jesus (Acts 4:29-31). The filling of the Holy Spirit was not a one-off experience, but rather, a regular experience to give them boldness and the ability to perform signs and wonders that would point people to Jesus.

4. Does this Acts view of signs and wonders differ from your personal experiences?

PRAYING FOR PEOPLE TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

For this course, we are referring to a time when people are called forward to receive prayer for a particular task or purpose, such as more boldness, or to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Praying for people to be healed or to be delivered from an evil spirit are outside the scope of this course.

A common approach is to ask the seekers to stand with their eyes closed, with their hands out in front of them as if they are receiving a gift.

Often in New Testament times, power was received through the laying on of hands (e.g. Acts 8:17, 2 Tim 1:6-7). We encourage those praying to simply place a hand on the seeker's shoulder and pray out loud in the context of the appeal. For example, if the seekers were called forward to receive prayer for boldness, you might pray something like 'I pray that [person's name] might be filled with your Holy Spirit and receive boldness' or using a Bible verse such as 'in 2 Timothy, your word tells us that the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.' Then pray for someone else.

When we pray in this way, a range of experiences are common. Some people feel nothing. Others feel a warm sensation in their body. Some people become overcome with emotion and laugh, cry or even groan uncontrollably. Others start shaking or even fall to the floor. Remember, the purpose of all these experiences is to draw people to God. In each case, you should simply thank God for what he is doing and continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to minister to all who are seeking God.

As a general rule, we discourage public speaking in tongues. There are two types of tongues referred to in the Bible:

- a) A personal prayer language that helps the speaker, as in 1 Corinthians 14:2
- b) An ability to speak in another language, as in Acts 2:4, such that those listening might understand the message. Unless the seeker can understand your 'tongue', there seems little point in using it.

Summary

The disciples prayed for the Holy Spirit regularly. It was never a once and done thing. The purpose of signs and wonders is to point people towards God.



What is the main thing you want to remember from this session?

SECTION 5

Local variations

This course is intended as a generic guide for Mercy Seat Counselling. Since no two churches are the same, this section is designed as a checklist for your leader to confirm your local variations.

1. **Approach:** who decides who counsels who (e.g. does the leader choose or are individuals free to be proactive. Do you decide based on gender, age, history etc.?)
2. **Commitment:** are you expected to be available to counsel at every meeting you attend or is there a roster? If you are going to be away, do you need to tell anyone?
3. **Pre- or post-service meetings and prayer:** do you meet together before or after the service to pray or to report details of seekers? How do team members hear of any special arrangements?
4. **Resources:** where are the tissues? Do you have Bibles and booklets available to give to seekers?
5. **Further counselling room:** if you need to move the seeker from the mercy seat for further counselling, where should you take them?
6. **Follow up:** how are commitments recorded? What follow up is expected?

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

A1. Personalising God's Promises

PERSONALISING GOD'S PROMISES

SHOW THE WORD

Do not merely quote the scripture or paraphrase what it says – look it up.

AFFIRM THE WORD

Ask questions like 'do you believe that this includes you?' Or affirm 'this includes you'.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Encourage (but do not push) the seeker to pray out loud.



CLARIFY THE WORD

Remind the seeker of what is not there. For instance, (Romans 8:1 says that there is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So they personally are not condemned.

PERSONALISE THE WORD

Ask the seeker to read the Scripture with their own name in place of the general term (e.g. 'For God so loved David that he gave his only son ...')

APPENDIX 2

A2.Helpful Scriptures

Assurance

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Discipleship

Matthew 4:19 Jesus said, ‘Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Faith

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 12:2a Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Forgiveness

Matthew 19:26 With God all things are possible.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

God’s Love

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Healing

James 5:15a The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.

The Holy Spirit

Ephesians 5:8

1 Cor 2:12 We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from *God, what we may understand what God has freely given us.*

John 16:13a But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

Human Worth

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Jesus

Isaiah 53:6 The Lord has laid on him (Jesus Christ) the iniquity of us all.

John 1:14a The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Hebrews 12:2a Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Love

1 Cor 13:8a Love never fails

Peace

Phil 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Prayer

James 5:16 The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Matthew 11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe you have received it, and it will be yours.

Salvation

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Acts 16:31 Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.

Scripture

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

Sin

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Unity

Col 3:13-14 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Wisdom

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

APPENDIX 3

A3. Ways to Share the Gospel

THE ABC'S OF SALVATION

A – Admit your need

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23

B – Believe on Christ

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved” Acts 16:31

C – Commit yourself to Christ

*“But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become sons of God”
John 1:12*

USING VERSES FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Humanity's Sin

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23

Sin's Penalty

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

God's Provision

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

Humanity's Response of Faith

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

Humanity's Response of Repentance

God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? Romans 2:4b

Humanity's Response of Commitment

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2

A4. Coping with Objections

Often, the seeker may question or pose objections to following Jesus. Here are some of the most common ones with Bible verses to counter these views.

However, to use these verses sensitively!

"I am not a sinner."

This does not mean the person lacks an awareness of sin; but rather the conviction of the Spirit. Talk about what is meant by the word sinner, and use Scripture to show the error of this "defence."

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray; each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53: 6

"I am too great a sinner."

This may signify despair ("My case is hopeless") or evasion ("Don't bother me"); but in either case show that they have simply stressed their privileged position as those whom Jesus came to save!

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:10

"Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'" Luke 5: 31-32

"I believe I'll have a chance after death."

There are cults which teach this, so the idea may be strongly rooted in a person's mind, even though it lacks biblical authority.

"Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" Hebrews 9: 27

"I tell you ..., now is the day of salvation" 2 Corinthians 6: 2

"I'll be all right if I am sincere in what I believe."

If this has any validity, it is for people ignorant of the gospel, not for any who choose to reject Christ. Often, deliberate indecision is the same as rejection.

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

See also Proverbs 14:12.

"I haven't decided which side I'm on – I'm neutral."

It may not always be expressed like this, but the attitude is often apparent; and the answer given is similar to that of the previous question.

"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:18

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." John 3:36

"Not now, some other time."

It may help to discover why later is more convenient than now, or seems more convenient. This comment often means an unwillingness to face facts now, so show not only why now is essential but also why it is possible.

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring."
Proverbs 27:1

"I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation."
2 Corinthians 6:2

"I don't believe in hell."

Some, possibly influenced by the teaching of certain cults, take false comfort in this idea, and deny the teaching of the Bible.

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."
Matthew 10:28

See also Revelation 20:15 and 21:8.

"I don't need to repent."

Some say it is enough to honour the teaching of Jesus as they would that of any great man, but if Christ's teaching is properly read, the insistence on commitment is apparent. The word translated as repentance means "changing one's mind or turning from one thing to another" - the gospel (Good News) is to be accepted (and lived by), not merely admired.

"Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15

"God ... commands all people everywhere to repent." Acts 17: 30

"I'll stand on my own good works."

Depending upon good works as being sufficient, like merely joining a church (or The Salvation Army), is to ignore the facts. Salvation is by God's grace, to be accepted, not merited.

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”
Ephesians 2:8-9*

“he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” Titus 3:5

See also Matthew 7:21-23.

"I think everyone will be saved."

This is usually more hopeful than thoughtful, its appeal being that it makes a present decision much less urgent. Reason supports the realism of the Bible.

“But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matthew 7:14

“do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?” 1 Corinthians 6:9

"I don't believe in God."

This opinion does not invalidate the reality of God! It may really mean, "I don't want to believe in God" or even, "I would like to believe in God but I can't"-but as the presence of a person in a meeting suggests some recognition of the existence of God this objection calls for discussion of "Why not?". At the same time remember what the unspoken thought might be.

“The fool says in his heart, ‘there is no God’” Psalm 14:1

“What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness?” Romans 3:3

"I don't believe Jesus is the Son of God."

This may be evasion by use of a doctrinal argument (there are other varieties!). Move on with belief in God as revealed by Jesus, and note:

“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ‘Who is he, sir?’ the man asked. ‘Tell me so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said, ‘You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’ (John 9: 35-37).

“these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31

A5. Tips on How to Lead an Effective Study

Approach

These studies take into account some specific findings about how people learn, including that learners:

- ❑ are now-oriented – so we start with a few open questions to engage them
- ❑ learn best by saying and doing, not listening – so our studies are based around discussion, with only short comments or readings. We encourage the leader to facilitate more than teach
- ❑ bring experience – so we invite (expect?) most of the learning to come from discussions in the group, rather than new content in the study
- ❑ are self-directed – so we include a chance for them to apply their learning, individually.

The Need to Stimulate Interaction

One of the primary objectives of small groups is the application of the truth (James 1:22). Remember that people learn best by relating the learning to their own experiences and besides, our experiences also benefit each other.

For this reason, leaders should maximise interaction and use effective questioning techniques to draw out experiences and knowledge from the members, supplemented by short inputs of content. All content should then be discussed.

Of course, in preparing, you need to consider how much the members actually know about the topic as this determines how much content you suggest compared to how much you extract from the members.

HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE INTERACTION?

1. Set up the room as a circle so that everyone including the leader is facing each other (or for larger courses, have people sit around tables).
2. Gather information by asking open questions which encourage people to expand and cannot be answered with yes or no.
3. Be careful with 'why' as it can sound aggressive and may make people feel defensive. Rather than 'Why did you do that?' try 'What were your reasons for doing that?'

4. Use 'rebound' and 'boomerang' questions to have other group members answer questions before you do (e.g. 'What do others think?'; 'Does anyone have a different idea we should consider?').
5. Use closed questions only to check information or to cut someone off when you need to regain control (e.g. 'So you had a good time then?').
6. Watch for those who would like to participate and ask for their contribution. Read faces and body language.
7. See that everyone is involved in the discussion and has a chance to share.
8. Guide the discussion by switching from one person to another. Interject your viewpoint and experience occasionally.

COMMON MISTAKES THAT PREVENT INTERACTION?

1. Set up the room so that the leader is clearly separated from the other group members, and have the group members sitting in rows so that they can't easily see each other.
2. Ask lots of questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
3. Ask complex questions that no-one knows the answer to.
4. Answer all questions asked of you – and a few you ask of others as well.
5. Be afraid of silence. Don't give people time to think.
6. Pick on people and keep asking them questions. Pressure people to pray, read or speak.
7. Ask rhetorical questions. Anticipate when people want to answer a question then move on quickly.
8. Try to maintain control. Prevent all tangents as soon as you notice the conversation taking off.
9. Make questions sound conversational.
10. Ensure the group knows that you know all the answers.
11. Criticise people and allow people in the group to criticise others as well.
12. Be more interested in getting through the material than in the people who are present.
13. Share your viewpoint first.

