

CARE GUIDE FOR LEADERS



RIVER
VALLEY

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INTRODUCTION

God has designed us for relationship— not only with Him but with one another.

We are designed to thrive in community, not live in isolation. That is the heart and essential purpose of Small Groups and Serve Teams. They are a place where people can not only love their church family through acts of service, or learn more about God by studying His Word together, but also see God's heart represented through one another as group/team members come alongside each other in times of joy and difficulty. Small Groups and Serve Teams are places for people to lovingly invest in each other, become more devoted disciples of Jesus, and look more like Him day by day.

"...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." (Acts 2:46-47 NIV)

This Care Guide is here to help you as a leader respond to the needs of those in your Small Group or Serve Team, no matter what season of life they are in. In this guide, you will find:

- Helpful things to say (and avoid saying)
- Practical ways to show love in different situations and seasons
- When pastoral involvement might be beneficial
- Resources outside of your own support (or a pastor's) to which you can direct a team/group member in need
- Relevant Bible passages to read and pray together

A profound love comes from communities who love one another well. Don't miss a chance to make a lasting difference in someone's life. A loving community is where we were created to live and thrive!

"Be devoted to one another with [authentic] brotherly affection [as members of one family], give preference to one another in honor...¹³ contributing to the needs of God's people, pursuing [the practice of] hospitality.¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice [sharing others' joy], and weep with those who weep [sharing others' grief]."
(Romans 12:10-15 AMP)

CARE IN MOMENTS OF JOY

"Rejoice with those who rejoice..." (Romans 12:15 AMP)

Certain moments in life are especially significant opportunities to celebrate. When you show love and care in those memorable moments, you make a particularly deep impact on your Small Group or Serve Team members.

BIRTH OF A CHILD

"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD." (Psalm 127:3 NASB)

PRACTICAL WAYS TO CARE

The birth of a child brings great joy, but a newborn baby also comes with a high demand for energy, attention, and physical resources. As a Small Group or Serve Team, we have the opportunity to demonstrate love and care as our fellow group members celebrate this major event.

- Go in on a gift together.
- Host a baby shower.
- Organize a Care Calendar for meals (please refer to page 18).
- Visit them in the hospital.
- Offer to care for older children the first few days mom is at home.
- In the first few months of the baby's life, consistently check in and offer to babysit, clean the family home, bring meals, or run errands.

HOUSE MOVE

"Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established..." (Proverbs 24:3 NKJV)

PRACTICAL WAYS TO CARE

Preparing to move from one home to another is very exciting, but often quite a stressful event. As a leader, you can coordinate your group/team to help reduce a lot of the stress by showing tangible love and care.

- Offer to help pack boxes.
- Offer as a group/team to help out on moving day.
- Organize the group/team to provide lunch on the moving day for everyone who is helping in the move.
- Offer to care for children on moving day.
- Gather together and pray a blessing over their new home and pray for their neighborhood.

PREPARING TO GET MARRIED

"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24 NIV)

PRACTICAL WAYS TO CARE

A couple's wedding day is one of the most joyous and wonderful days of their lives. The season leading up to that day can be stressful and hectic at times. As a group/team, you can help make the engagement season, as well as the big day, less taxing for the couple.

- Plan a shower for the couple or the bride.
- Pray for them in your group/team meetings each week, especially as their wedding day approaches.
- Attend the wedding as a group.
- Go in together to cover one of their costlier gift registry items.

CARE IN TOUGH TIMES

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10 NIV)

PRACTICAL WAYS TO CARE DURING TOUGH TIMES

We all face difficulties in life. The Bible tells us that we will have trials of many kinds, but we are not to fear and be dismayed. God is our strength and very present help in times of trouble. He wants to be the one to whom we run and our source of strength and comfort. Your group or team's primary role is to support one another in difficult times, such as the death of a family member, a divorce, the loss of a job/home, or a serious accident.

- Pray with them and for them! Set up a schedule (day of the week, time of day) when you will pray, and text them to let them know you are praying right then, or call them to pray for/with them.
- Spend time with them so they know they are not alone as they go through this difficult situation. Presence can speak louder than words.
- Send a handwritten note or text to the individual as a way of encouragement and strength. Include Scriptures that are appropriate.
- Connect with them by phone to let them know you, as an individual, are there for them.
- Provide some meals to the family, if applicable. (Page 18)
- Be aware of other practical ways the group/team could help (like running errands, driving them to a doctor's appointment, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, or providing childcare)
- Attend the funeral if a loved one has passed away. Your presence matters more than your words.
- Invite them over for dinner, coffee or a walk one month, two months, and regularly thereafter so they know you have not forgotten about them and their loss.

DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
(Matthew 5:4 NIV)

When a group/team member experiences the death of someone close to them, it is an opportunity to show that we care for them and want to support them throughout each stage of their grief process.

When someone loses a parent, a child, or a sibling to whom they are closely connected, please let the campus pastor, care pastor, or another member of the campus pastoral staff know. That will allow the pastors and staff to determine who will reach out immediately, as well as to individually express their condolences appropriately the next time they each see this member of the church family.

As a group/team, please be present with your friend while respecting appropriate boundaries for their time with family and other friends. Plan with members of the group when you will take turns reaching out and (if desired) going to be with the group member. Be sensitive to the survivor's needs. Your presence matters. It's incredibly difficult to feel alone at such a vulnerable time.

Here's how you can use discretion to best communicate and express love to any member of your community in these difficult times:

WHEN A SPOUSE PASSES AWAY

THINGS YOU CAN SAY

- Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Your presence and your tears can say more than your words.
- *"I'm so sorry—this is a terrible loss"* is better than simply, "I'm so sorry;" the last phrase helps validate and share in a person's grief.
- *"I'm here for you. Can I call you in a few days?"* Grieving people may have trouble asking for help, so it is helpful to take responsibility for contact and follow through.
- *"May we bring you a meal Tuesday?"* or *"We would like to rake the leaves in your yard Saturday—is that okay with you?"* instead of *"If there's anything I can do, just ask."*

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

- *"Your spouse is in heaven."* Even if this is true, it doesn't minimize the loss that the surviving spouse is going through.
- *"Maybe we should have prayed harder."* You never want to make them feel responsible for the death.
- *"Don't worry, God has a new mate for you."* This statement invalidates the need to mourn the loss of a loved one, and implies the person should find comfort in hoping for a replacement spouse.

WHEN A CHILD PASSES AWAY

THINGS YOU CAN SAY

- Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Your presence and your tears can say more than your words.
- *"I am so sorry! My heart breaks for you."*
- *"I care about you and am praying for you."*
- *"I don't know what to say. But please know that I'm here for you. We are here to walk through this with you."*
- After an appropriate length of time you may want to ask, *"How is your marriage doing?"* Losing a child can be very difficult in a marriage, so make sure you are checking in with them and, if need be, refer them to the care/connections pastor, or another pastor.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING:

- *"God wanted your child with Him."* This statement makes the parents feel as if God is angry with them or is punishing them.
- *"Well, at least you have your other children."*
- *"Everything happens for a reason; God will work this out for good."*

WHEN TO ENCOURAGE AN INDIVIDUAL TO MEET WITH A PASTOR

- The person has drastic changes in their eating/drinking.
- When the grief paralyzes the rest of life and prevents the person from caring for themselves, sustaining a job, or taking care of their children.
- The person becomes inward, or reclusive.
- The person doesn't leave home for an abnormal period of time, or only leaves for work and consistently declines social interactions (group meetings, Sunday services).
- The person shows signs of suicidal intent.
- When the grief never seems to end_after a natural period of grief, the person makes extreme efforts to keep his/her loved one alive and ever-present in their thought life and daily conversation.

ADDICTION

"...He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."
(Isaiah 61:1 NIV)

There are times when an individual may be struggling with an addiction or a repetitive pattern of sin. We can be assured that Jesus came to set them free, and to give them life abundantly! As a group/team, you can support the individual by praying for them and encouraging them to attend a Freedom, Clean, or separate addiction-specific group or recovery program.

There may be times that pastoral staff needs to be involved, and the person may need professional counseling and recovery guidance. Here's what you can do to help them find freedom from their addiction:

THINGS TO SAY

- *"It is ok to feel powerless by yourself. But with Jesus freedom is at hand."* It is validating for the person to hear hope.
- *"You're not alone."* Addiction can be a stigmatized subject so the person may not have met anyone else who has struggled with and publicly acknowledged an addiction.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

- *"I don't know anyone else in the church struggling with this issue."* Sometimes it can seem as if they are the only ones struggling with the issue because people have not had the opportunity to share their struggle in a secure environment.
- *"If you really wanted to, you would just stop."* It is not your position to judge that person, but instead to point them towards Jesus. Let God handle the conviction; your role is to be steady in love.

WHEN TO ENCOURAGE AN INDIVIDUAL TO MEET WITH A PASTOR

- The person asks for a referral.
- The addiction has become dangerous to the point where they may lose their life or become injured/disabled.
- The addiction significantly impairs relationships with others and God.
- The person begins to experience depression or anxiety after stopping the addictive behavior.

MARRIAGE STRUGGLES

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged."

(1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NLT)

Marriages take work, and couples face rocky roads at times. It is important to rally around couples and not take sides in those moments. We believe marriages can thrive and survive rough times. We provide great resources to help build and strengthen marriages so they will be strong and life-giving.

- **Becoming One** – Three times a year we offer this seminar that is highly recommended for all couples to attend. Please see the events calendar on the church website for the next one offered.
- **Small groups for married couples** – A great way to strengthen your marriage is to attend a marriage-focused group. Please refer to the small group locator on the church website for topics, dates and times for groups offered at your campus.
- **Marriage Nights** – Twice a year we have Marriage Night, which is an

opportunity to connect with other couples and hear an amazing speaker address topics surrounding marriage.

- Marriage Mentoring – This is one of our most highly recommended resources for couples that want to see their marriage be all God has for them. It is an 8-week mentoring ministry where the couple in need would meet with a trained mentor couple to effectively determine the areas of struggle and then work at developing solutions to the challenges they face. *To get connected with this ministry, please email marriage@rivervalley.org.*

HOW TO HELP A COUPLE STRUGGLING IN THEIR MARRIAGE

- Give them hope! Show them places in the Bible that talk about hope founded on God’s purpose and power for relationships to be restored and reconciled. These scripture references can be found on page 19 of this resource guide.
- Let them know that many couples experience rough roads but that getting some outside help is the best next step.
- Be an encourager of the relationship rather than taking sides. Be FOR the marriage and hold them both equally accountable for working on the relationship.
- Encourage them to meet with their care/connections pastor or refer them to rivervalley.org/marriage to complete the Marriage Contact form to get connected to a marriage mentoring couple.

DIVORCE

When a couple is wrestling with the future of their marriage, we must use wisdom. It is not our choice—it rests solely between the couple and God. There are situations when divorce is the reasonable option (abuse, unrepentant unfaithfulness, etc.). Whether or not we agree with the decision, we are exhorted to love one another.

When a decision to divorce is made, we want to support either individual who wants to move forward while relying on and remaining in a relationship with God. We want to include them, pray for them, and be there for them. However, we recommend that someone of the same gender (or a couple together) provide this support and encouragement to this couple.

THINGS YOU CAN SAY

- *"We are praying for you."* Show the love of Jesus.
- *"Please join us."* After divorce, many people have trouble re-adjusting to a single lifestyle. Sadly, sometimes, divorced people are left out of social situations because they are divorced. Make an effort to include them in activities. If they express being uncomfortable with other couples, assure them that they are welcome and that the group would love to have them continue to be involved in activities.
- *"We live in a broken world—and that affects everything—even marriage."* It can be helpful to acknowledge that the brokenness, sinfulness, and grief we experience on this earth are far from God's ideal for us. But in the midst of every situation, He will provide comfort and will lead them into a healthy and hope-filled future.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

- *"God hates divorce."* Regardless of how you view divorce, broken relationships do happen within the church because of the presence of sin in the world. Instead of judging the couple, show God's love, healing, and grace.
- *"It's not your fault."* Don't discourage their acceptance of personal responsibility; eventually, part of the healing process comes from acknowledging their responsibility, receiving forgiveness from God, forgiving their spouse, and allowing God to work in their heart.
- *"I'm on your side."* Do not take sides in any divorce. Refuse to feed bitterness or resentment in either person toward the other individual. That is destructive behavior and will only delay healing. Instead, promote redemption of the situation by encouraging an amicable relationship. Do what you can to keep both of the individuals connected to God, to a small group, and to church.

WHEN TO ENCOURAGE THE PERSON TO MEET WITH THEIR CAMPUS PASTOR

- When an individual references self-destructive or suicidal thoughts or feelings.
- If either individual shows a lengthy pattern of isolating themselves from other people.
- When an individual misses work repeatedly or is unable to consistently perform their daily activities.

RESOURCES

- Divorce Care small group – please review the small group locator on the website for the day and the time a group will be meeting.

TERMINAL ILLNESS

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV)

When a person receives a diagnosis from their doctor that they have a terminal illness, it feels like the world is crashing in. The shock, the medical decisions, and the unknown are some of the things that an individual or family may face. A caring and loving group/team can be incredibly meaningful to the individual in times of challenge and difficulty. **Please inform a member of your campus pastoral staff immediately if a group/team member receives a diagnosis of a terminal illness.**

THINGS TO SAY OR DO

- Offer specific practical help (e.g. *"May we bring you a meal Tuesday?"* or *"We would like to rake the leaves in your yard Saturday—is that okay with you?"* rather than *"If there's anything I can do, just ask."*)
- *"It's ok to be angry."* God desires open dialogue—encourage your friend to let out their true emotions with you and God.
- Keep them focused on God's faithfulness—God is not the author of sickness and disease. He is there with them in the midst of their struggle. He is the way through every challenge they will face. He is faithful.
- *"We'll see you later when we come back to visit again."* It's important for your friend to know you won't abandon them when times get tough—they will be encouraged knowing that they can look forward to future times together.
- Try to fit your group/team around their schedule—if it is possible for them to actively participate, create normalcy by moving the meeting to wherever they are. If they cannot meet, call them or set up a video call (Facetime, Google Meet, Skype) during your small group to let them join virtually, or at least know you are praying for them.
- Encourage them to consult their physicians about any changes in medications rather than making decisions on their own in difficult moments.
- *When appropriate, ask them if end-of-life documents are in place.* This is a delicate situation. We encourage this only if the right opportunity

presents itself. If the topic does not come up, encourage them to talk with a pastor about these issues.

- If they want a visit from a pastor, please ask them to contact one of the staff pastors with whom they have a relationship.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING/DOING

- *"All things work for good through God's plans."* Though this is true, it may come across as wrong to someone going through a terminal illness. They may get the false impression that God wants them to die, when in fact John 10:10 says, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."
- *"Just believe more, and you won't be angry/will be healed."* This false statement causes guilt and inadequacy. God never uses guilt to inspire faith.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV)

We know at times that either through unforeseen circumstances such as a job loss, medical costs from an injury, or financial decisions that take an unexpected turn, individuals or families may find themselves struggling to make ends meet. In order to address a variety of situations related to financial assistance, the River Valley Church leadership has established the guidelines outlined below to provide assistance to an individual or family.

THINGS TO SAY/DO

- Pray with them.
- In some situations, if the need is small and not recurring, you may want to consider how your group can collectively assist your friend with their immediate need before turning to the church's benevolence funds. *We do not expect a Small Group or Serve Team to support an individual in financial difficulties to a significant or long-term degree.*
- Encourage the group/team member to review the list of governmental or non-profit resources available through their county.
- Encourage the individual or family to apply for Benevolence Assistance at their campus. The individual can find a Care Request form on the

church website: rivervalley.org/care-request

- You also may want to encourage them to attend a Financial Peace group. This is an excellent class to help them rearrange and realign their budget, perspective on money/possessions, and financial priorities and choices with wise principles from the Bible.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING/DOING

- Never make any promises, on behalf of yourself or the church, for financial assistance.

HOSPITAL VISITATION CARE TIPS

"I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." (Matthew 25:36 NIV)

GROUP SUPPORT

- Be sensitive about the timing of your visit. Call the patient or a close family member to determine when is the best time to visit.
- If possible, have one member of the group/team set up the meetings with the patient so that there is a consistent visitation schedule.

PLEASE...

- Knock before entering a room. Observe signs, notices, and precautions on the patient's door.
- If possible, sit where you can maintain comfortable eye contact
- Be cheerful, and make pleasant conversation.
- Shape the tone and substance of your conversation from cues offered by the patient.
- Listen attentively by giving the patient your undivided attention.
- Let the patient know he/she can talk about sensitive subjects.
- Excuse yourself when the doctor enters the room unless requested to stay.
- Share Scripture and ask the patient if they have particular concerns as you prepare to pray (see several scriptures below).
- Inform the care/connections or another pastor of your visit.

PLEASE DON'T...

- Be insulted by a patient's words/attitudes or register shock at a patient's appearance.
- Offer false optimism or medical advice, nor express criticism about the doctor or the treatment.
- Touch the equipment or sit on the patient's bed.
- Tell the patient unpleasant news - including your own troubles.
- Whisper or talk about the patient's condition with family members or friends in the room. Step outside, if it is necessary to speak with family members or medical staff.
- Break hospital rules or violate confidentiality issues.
- Awaken the patient unless a nurse gives approval.
- Help the patient get out of bed or give food or drink without a nurse's approval.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Psalm 23; 34; 46; 61; 62; 63; 103; 116; 121; 139
- Mark 2:3-5

RESPONSIBILITY

It's very important that as we care for people we understand the difference between being responsible "FOR" versus responsible "TO". We are NOT responsible to fix or parent adults. Christians can get confused when we equate being responsible FOR others with being responsible TO others.

RESPONSIBLE FOR.....RESPONSIBLE TO

Listening for Heaven's Sake by Dr. Gary Sweeten, David Ping & Anne Clippard

<i>When I believe I am responsible FOR others</i>	<i>When I know I am responsible TO others</i>
I... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fix ● Protect ● Rescue ● Control ● Carry their feelings ● Don't listen 	I... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Show empathy ● Encourage ● Share ● Confront ● Am sensitive ● Listen
I feel... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tired ● Anxious ● Fearful ● Liable 	I feel... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relaxed ● Free ● Aware ● High self-worth
I am concerned with... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The solution ● Details ● Answers ● Circumstances ● Being right ● Performance 	I am concerned with... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relating person to person as an equal to others ● Listening to feelings and thoughts ● Respecting the person
I AM BEING MANIPULATIVE. (Consciously or unconsciously) I EXPECT THE PERSON TO LIVE UP TO MY EXPECTATIONS.	I AM BEING A HELPER/GUIDE. I CAN TRUST GOD AND TRUST THE OTHER PERSON. I CAN LET GO AND ACCEPT OUTCOMES.

SETTING UP A MEAL/CARE CALENDAR

When it comes to providing meals for someone in your Small Group or Serve Team in times of need, we would like our fellow members and friends to provide as much support as possible. This is what the Biblical community is all about. If a group/team is too small or is not able to gather enough participation, they can go to our River Valley website to complete a Care Request for meals rivervalley.org/prayer-care.

We suggest you use a calendar tool to schedule meals. You can find it at: **www.carecalendar.org**. This site allows you to create a calendar where group members can log in and sign up for a particular day. To use the Care Calendar, you will need to gather the following information about the individual/family to whom you are providing care:

- Email address, home address, phone number
- How long they will need meals delivered, and how many per day/week
- What time of day (give a window) they would like to receive meals
- Dietary restrictions, allergies, and preferences
- How many people should be accounted for

Tips for using carecalendar.org:

- People will only be able to sign up for dates for which you have created a "need". If you do not have specific dates, create a need for each day during the period, and then specify the number or frequency needed when you send an email/text to your group.
- Include login information when you send a message to your group.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

DEATH OF A CHILD OR SPOUSE

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5 ESV)

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:16 ESV)

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."
The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
(Lamentations 3:22-26 ESV)*

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV)

MARRIAGE STRUGGLES

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7 NLT)

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's Word. (Ephesians 5:22-26 NLT)

TERMINAL ILLNESS

We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone. (Psalm 33:20-22 NLT)

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29 NLT)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DEATH OF A CHILD

Surviving the Loss of a Child: Support for Grieving Parents

– Elizabeth Brown

It's Okay to Cry:

A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Through the Losses of Life

–H. Norman Wright

DEATH OF A SPOUSE

From One Widow to Another

–Miriam Neff

A Grief Observed

–CS Lewis

Reflections of a Grieving Spouse:

The Unexpected Journey from Loss to Renewed Hope

–H. Norman Wright

ANY DEATH OF LOVED ONE

Good Grief

– Granger E. Westberg

Find a GriefShare group in your area: www.griefshare.org

MARRIAGE STRUGGLES

The Five Love Needs

-Dr. Gary Rosberg

When Life Hurts

-Jimmy Evans

DIVORCE

When I Do Becomes I Don't: Practical Steps During Separation and Divorce

-Laura Petherbridge

Growing Through Divorce

-Jim Smoke

TERMINAL ILLNESS

Christ the Healer

-F. Bosworth

Still Standing: Hope and Encouragement in the Face of Serious Illness

-Pamela Burton



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