

PRAYER, Daniel G. Bagby/BTSR

1. There are occasions when a prayer early in a conversation will not only reassure a parishioner (that you really are a minister!), but also give you a clue about their major concerns: "I can see that you are distressed. Is there anything in particular that you would like for me to pray about for you?" Listen to their answer. Take it seriously.
2. Sometimes we can use the "Pauline" example of telling people that we are going to pray for them--and telling them in the process what we are going to pray about: "I'm going to be praying for you, that God may give you peace of mind during this pressured time, and that you may sense God's presence when you feel most alone or isolated; I will also pray that God may give you courage and strength as you face some of the news you're waiting for, and that God will give your family sensitivity and understanding to help you in ways you most need help right now. My prayer also is that God will give you patience when you need it, wisdom for choices you may have, and comfort when you hurt and need relief..." (this is longer than usual, for an example). Sometimes the setting or situation is not conducive for praying at that moment; but you can state what you will be praying about. Such specific prayers also tell your friend that you have been listening to her/his heart and words.
3. Prayer can sometimes instruct and offer care to persons who have certain unmentioned needs which you surmise are there--but which they have not acknowledged. Your prayer then helps them accept some normal feelings they might be trying to deny; it may also assist them to understand how to pray for themselves: "Dear Lord, you understand this dear person's struggle as no one else; help her in this distress, to trust you with her pain; when she is in pain, strengthen her through her anger and misery. When she wonders if you care, help her remember your agony as You watched your own son die, and waited helplessly by. Remind her if she becomes impatient and frustrated with you, that you love her enough to outlast all the bitterness she may feel, even as you did so many times with your beloved Israel..." etc
4. Don't pray too long; few people need it. Remember to pray for family members, and concerns expressed. Avoid generalities; Jesus called them "vain repetitions."
5. Don't promise things in prayer you can't deliver--and God may not. When asked if you would pray that your patient may be delivered from terminal cancer,(what's your theology?) respond : "I'll be glad to pray for your healing, and know that miracles can happen; I will also pray that if it is not possible for you to heal, that God may grant you every possible comfort, and the strength to face the pain you feel, and that God will walk with you as a sure presence even if it must be through the valley of the shadow of death..."

For further reading:

Richard Cabot and Russell Dicks, *The Art of Ministering to the Sick*
Michael Quoist, *Prayers*