



CARE BEFORE CRISIS™ RESOURCE HUB

TOOLKIT

# Faith Leader Anchor Toolkit

Sermon outlines, prayer prompts, and referral cards — for shepherds who want to walk with their people *before* the crisis.

Faith leaders are often the first call when life gets heavy — before a therapist, before a doctor, sometimes before family. This toolkit helps you meet that moment with both **compassion and a plan**: language to preach, prayers to pray, and clear, caring ways to connect people to help when they need more than you can carry alone. It is built for the Black church and every faith community that has long been a place of refuge, on the conviction that **faith and mental wellness belong together**.

## If you or someone else is in crisis

You don't have to handle it alone. Call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), 24/7, free and confidential. If there is immediate danger to life, call **911**. To connect with ongoing support, reach **Care Connections™** at **214-506-0691** or **Dominique@amindfulresource.org**.

*This toolkit equips faith leaders to support, encourage, and refer. It is not therapy, diagnosis, or medical advice, and it does not ask you to be a clinician. Your calling is to shepherd — to notice, to love, and to connect people to care. "Prayer and a plan," together.*



## START HERE

# How to use this toolkit

This is a working toolkit, not a book to read once. Pull from it as the season and the need require:

- **Preaching & teaching** — six ready-to-adapt sermon outlines (Part 3) that name mental health from the pulpit and reduce shame.
- **Pastoral prayer & altar ministry** — a prayer-prompt library (Part 4) organized by need, for the moment someone comes forward.
- **One-on-one care** — what to say, what to avoid, and how to recognize when someone needs more than prayer (Part 5).
- **Referral** — printable cards (Part 6) you can keep in your Bible, the church office, and the welcome desk.
- **Your own soul** — caring for the caregiver, because you cannot pour from an empty cup (Part 7).

### The heart of it

This toolkit was built with A Mindful Resource Inc.'s **Care Before Crisis™** model: meet people early, build trust first, and connect them to the right help before a hard season becomes an emergency.

## Part 1 · The faith leader as anchor

### Why your role matters

In many communities — and especially in the Black church — the faith leader is a trusted anchor. People bring you their marriages, their grief, their fear, and their shame long before they would tell anyone else. That trust is sacred, and it is also a powerful point of **prevention**. A word from the pulpit can give someone permission to admit they are struggling. A prayer at the altar can be the first step toward help. You are positioned to catch people *early*.

### Prayer and a plan

Faith and care are not rivals. Prayer is real and powerful — and so is the wisdom God has placed in counselors, doctors, and trained helpers. Encouraging someone to see a professional is not a failure of faith; it is faith *in action*. We hold both: we pray **and** we make a plan. “Faith without works is dead” applies to caring for one another, too.

*“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”*

— Psalm 147:3, KJV

### Know your role — and its edges

You are a shepherd, not a therapist. That is not a limitation; it is clarity. Your gifts are presence, encouragement, spiritual guidance, and connection to community. When someone's pain is beyond what care and prayer can address — when there is talk of suicide, abuse, addiction, or a mind that has lost touch with reality — the most loving, faithful thing you can do is help them reach professional and crisis care. Staying within your role keeps both of you safe.



### A note on trust and confidentiality

**Hold confidence carefully.** People trust you with their hardest truths. Keep what is shared private — with one exception: when someone is in danger of harming themselves or another, or when a child or vulnerable person may be at risk, safety comes first and you help them get immediate help. Make that boundary clear and kind.



## Part 2 · Becoming a mental-health-friendly congregation

Culture is built in small, repeated choices. These practices help your congregation become a place where it is safe to not be okay — and safe to get help.

### 1. Name it from the front

Mention mental health in announcements, prayers, and sermons the way you would physical health. When leadership says the words “anxiety,” “depression,” and “therapy” without flinching, shame loses its grip.

### 2. Watch your language

Retire phrases that shame (“just pray harder,” “you don’t have enough faith,” “real men don’t cry”). Replace them with language that holds both faith and honesty (“God is with you in this, and it’s wise to get help, too”).

### 3. Make help visible

Keep the referral cards (Part 6) at the welcome desk and in restrooms. Put 988 and a local care contact in the bulletin and on screens. Visibility tells people the door is already open.

### 4. Equip your ministry leaders

Ushers, deacons, youth and men’s/women’s ministry leaders, and the prayer team meet people in their hardest moments. A short training (AMRI’s courses can help) gives them confidence to listen, respond, and refer.

### 5. Build a referral relationship

Identify a few trusted, culturally responsive counselors and Care Connections™ as your go-to partners *before* you need them, so a referral is a warm hand-off, not a cold search.

### 6. Care for those who serve

Leaders burn out quietly. Build rhythms of rest and check-ins for your team (see Part 7).

#### Remember

Reducing stigma is not lowering your theology. It is removing the shame that keeps people from the help God has provided.



## Part 3 · Sermon outlines

Six outlines to adapt to your voice, tradition, and translation. Each names a real struggle, anchors it in Scripture, and ends by pointing people toward both God and help. Scripture references are given so you can read them in your preferred translation; short quotations here are from the KJV.

### 1. It's Okay to Not Be Okay

**Anchor text:** Psalm 42 ("Why art thou cast down, O my soul?") · Psalm 13

**Big idea:** Lament is in the Bible. Bringing our heaviness honestly to God is an act of faith, not a lack of it.

#### Movement of the message

1. Open the Psalms of lament — David, Elijah, even Jesus in Gethsemane all voiced anguish.
2. Name the lie that faith means always smiling; honesty before God is worship.
3. Show how lament moves *through* pain toward hope — it does not deny the pain or stay stuck in it.
4. Invite the congregation to bring their real selves to God this week.

**Illustration prompt:** Tell of a saint who 'had it all together' on Sunday but was quietly breaking — and the relief of finally being honest.

**Application / call to care:** Give permission to not be okay and to seek help. Offer prayer at the altar and hand out referral cards — 'a plan' alongside the prayer.

### 2. Carry Each Other

**Anchor text:** Galatians 6:2 ("Bear ye one another's burdens") · Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

**Big idea:** We were never meant to carry life alone. The church is God's plan for shared burdens.

#### Movement of the message

1. Define what it means to bear a burden — presence, not fixing.
2. Contrast isolation (the enemy's tactic) with community (God's design).
3. Challenge the 'I'm fine' culture; model asking for and offering help.
4. Cast vision for a congregation where no one struggles alone.

**Illustration prompt:** A picture of one log that smolders out alone versus coals together that keep the fire — community keeps us warm.

**Application / call to care:** Pair people for a 'check-in partner.' Point those carrying too much toward counseling and Care Connections™.

### 3. Rest for the Weary

**Anchor text:** Matthew 11:28–30 ("Come unto me, all ye that labour") · Exodus 20:8–11

**Big idea:** Rest is not laziness; it is obedience and grace. Burnout is real, and Sabbath is God's gift against it.

#### Movement of the message

1. Name the exhaustion many carry — work, caregiving, ministry, survival.
2. Teach Sabbath as trust: the world keeps spinning when we stop.



3. Distinguish ordinary tiredness from burnout and depression's heaviness.
4. Invite practical rhythms of rest and, where needed, professional support.

**Illustration prompt:** *The story of running on fumes until the body or spirit forces a stop — and learning rest before the breakdown.*

**Application / call to care:** Encourage one act of rest this week; for those whose heaviness won't lift with rest, encourage a conversation with a professional.

## 4. The Healing in Honesty

**Anchor text:** James 5:16 ("Confess your faults one to another... that ye may be healed") · Psalm 32

**Big idea:** Secrets keep us sick; honesty in safe community opens the door to healing.

### Movement of the message

1. Show how hidden struggle festers, while confession brings light.
2. Build the case for safe, confidential relationships in the body.
3. Address shame directly — grace meets us in the truth, not the performance.
4. Make the altar and small groups places of honesty, not judgment.

**Illustration prompt:** *A wound covered up that gets infected versus one brought into the light and cleaned — healing needs air.*

**Application / call to care:** Open space for honest prayer; connect those carrying heavy secrets (addiction, abuse, despair) to professional care and 988 if in crisis.

## 5. Hope When the Valley Is Dark

**Anchor text:** Psalm 23:4 ("Yea, though I walk through the valley...") · Lamentations 3:21–23

**Big idea:** God does not abandon us in the valley of depression and grief; even there, mercy is new each morning.

### Movement of the message

1. Validate the reality of dark valleys — grief, loss, depression.
2. Emphasize God's presence *in* the valley, not only on the mountaintop.
3. Speak tenderly about depression as a real condition, not a moral failure.
4. Hold out hope while pointing to the helpers God provides.

**Illustration prompt:** *Walking with someone through a literal dark passage — you don't deny the dark; you walk together until light returns.*

**Application / call to care:** Pray over the grieving and depressed; gently urge professional help for persistent heaviness, and 988 for any thoughts of suicide.

## 6. Strong Men Cry Too

**Anchor text:** John 11:35 ("Jesus wept") · 1 Kings 19 (Elijah) · Psalm 56:8



**Big idea:** Real strength includes honesty about pain. Jesus wept; godly men have always felt deeply. Silence is not strength.

**Movement of the message**

- 1.** Confront the cultural script that men must be invulnerable.
- 2.** Show Jesus and the men of Scripture expressing grief, fear, and need.
- 3.** Name the cost of bottling it up — in marriages, health, and life itself.
- 4.** Call men into brotherhood and honest support (connect to AMRI's BroChill™).

**Illustration prompt:** *A man who held everything in until it nearly cost him everything — and the freedom he found in finally speaking.*

**Application / call to care:** Invite men forward without shame; point them to brotherhood, counseling, and 988 if they are in crisis. Strength asks for help.



## Part 4 · Prayer-prompt library

Short, usable prayers and prompts for the altar, the hospital room, the phone call, and the quiet moment. Adapt freely. Let them be starting points for the Spirit, not scripts to recite.

### For the anxious and worried

Lord of peace, quiet the racing thoughts of my brother/sister. Where fear says the worst is coming, remind them You hold tomorrow. Steady their breath, settle their heart, and surround them with people who help carry the weight. Give them wisdom to seek support, and let Your peace, which passes understanding, guard their mind. Amen.

### For the grieving

God of all comfort, You are near to the brokenhearted. Hold \_\_\_\_\_ in their loss. Make room for their tears; do not let them grieve alone. Send Your comfort through Your people and, where needed, through wise counsel. In time, turn their mourning into hope. Amen.

### For the one carrying depression

Faithful God, when the heaviness will not lift and joy feels far away, be the light in this valley. Remind \_\_\_\_\_ that this darkness is not a measure of Your love or their worth. Surround them with care, lead them to the help they need, and renew Your mercies on them morning by morning. Amen.

### For someone in crisis (pray, then act)

God of refuge, be very present right now. Cover \_\_\_\_\_ with Your protection and Your peace, and put the right people in their path this very hour. — Then move: stay with them, call 988 together, or call 911 if there is danger to life. Prayer and a plan, together.

### For the caregiver and the weary

Lord, You see those pouring themselves out — the caregivers, the helpers, the ones holding others up. Renew their strength. Teach them holy rest. Let them receive care, not only give it, and carry what is not theirs to You. Amen.

### For those battling addiction

Mighty God, break every chain. Walk with \_\_\_\_\_ one day, one hour at a time. Surround them with honest community and the help of those trained to support recovery. Where there is shame, pour grace; where there is relapse, pour mercy; where there is struggle, pour strength. Amen.

### Over the whole congregation

Father, make this house a refuge — a place where it is safe to not be okay and safe to get help. Knit us together so no one struggles alone. Give us eyes to notice, hearts to listen, and courage to point one another to You and to the care You provide. Amen.



### **A prayer for the faith leader (for you)**

Lord, I cannot be everyone's everything, and I was never meant to be. Give me discernment to know my role and humility to refer. Guard my own heart and home. Let me shepherd from rest, not running on empty, and remind me that the Chief Shepherd holds them — and me. Amen.



## Part 5 · When someone needs more than prayer

Prayer is never the wrong response — and sometimes it is not the *only* response needed. These are signs that a loving referral is wise, and language to make it.

### Warning signs to take seriously

- Talking about wanting to die, being a burden, or having no reason to live — **take every mention seriously.**
- Withdrawing from church, family, and the things they used to love.
- Dramatic changes in mood, sleep, appetite, energy, or appearance.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs; reckless or out-of-character behavior.
- Giving away possessions, 'getting affairs in order,' or saying goodbye.
- Hopelessness that won't lift, or a mind that seems detached from reality.
- Any sign of abuse, or danger to a child or vulnerable person.

#### When safety is the question

If someone mentions suicide or you sense immediate danger, do not leave them alone, do not promise secrecy, and get help now: call or text **988** together, or call **911** if life is in danger. This is faithful, not faithless.

### Say this — not that

How we respond can open a door or close it.

| Instead of...                                            | Try...                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Just pray about it / have more faith."                  | "Let's pray — and let's also get you some support. Both matter."                 |
| "Others have it worse."                                  | "What you're carrying is real, and you don't have to carry it alone."            |
| "You'll be fine, snap out of it."                        | "I'm here. Tell me more about what this has been like."                          |
| "That's a spiritual attack; you don't need a counselor." | "God works through counselors and doctors too. Can I help you connect with one?" |
| (Silence / changing the subject)                         | "Thank you for trusting me with this. Let's take a next step together."          |

### How to make a warm referral

1. **Affirm the relationship:** "I care about you, and I'm not going anywhere."
2. **Normalize help:** "Talking to a counselor is wisdom, the same way we see a doctor for our bodies."
3. **Offer the next step, concretely:** hand them a referral card; offer to call Care Connections™ together (214-506-0691).
4. **Stay connected:** "Can I check in with you this week?" Follow up — a referral is a hand-off, not a goodbye.



**5. If there's any danger:** 988 or 911 now; stay with them.



## Part 6 · Printable referral & pocket cards

Print these, cut along the borders, and keep them where people can reach them — your Bible, the welcome desk, restrooms, and your leaders' pockets. Print on cardstock for durability.

### You Are Not Alone

Help is here, day or night.

#### Call or text 988

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline · 24/7

Emergency: **911**

#### Care Connections™

214-506-0691

[Dominique@amindfulresource.org](mailto:Dominique@amindfulresource.org)

### Prayer & a Plan

It's okay to not be okay.

God is with you — and help is, too.

#### Reach out:

988 — call or text, 24/7

Care Connections™

214-506-0691

*A Mindful Resource Inc.*

### For Leaders: How to Refer

1. "I care about you."
2. "Help is wisdom — let's connect you."
3. Hand this card / call together.
4. "Can I check in this week?"
5. Danger? 988 or 911 now.

### Wallet Card

#### Care Before Crisis™

*Not therapy first. Trust first.*

988 — Crisis (call/text)

911 — Emergency

214-506-0691 — Care Connections™

Tip: laminate the wallet cards. Reorder or customize with your church's name and a local counselor before printing a batch.



## Part 7 · Caring for the caregiver (you)

You shepherd a flock through their hardest moments. That weight is real, and ignoring it does not make you more faithful — it makes you more vulnerable to burnout. Your well-being is part of your ministry's health.

### Signs you may be running on empty

- Dreading the people or work you once loved; growing cynicism or numbness.
- Exhaustion that rest doesn't fix; trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Irritability at home; your family getting your leftovers.
- Using busyness, food, or substances to cope; pulling back from your own walk with God.

### Rhythms that protect you

- **Sabbath** — a real, regular day to stop. Lead from rest.
- **Your own people** — a mentor, peers, or a counselor who pastors *you*.
- **Boundaries** — you can care deeply and still say “not right now.” Refer; you don't carry it all.
- **Your own care plan** — if your heaviness won't lift, seek professional help. 988 is for you, too.

#### Permission

“The Chief Shepherd” holds the flock — and holds you. You are allowed to be a person who also needs care.

## A note on using this toolkit well

Adapt every part to your tradition, translation, and community. Keep crisis numbers current and verify your local referral partners. Most of all, lead with love: people remember being seen and walked with long after they forget the words.

### If you or someone else is in crisis

You don't have to handle it alone. Call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), 24/7, free and confidential. If there is immediate danger to life, call **911**. To connect with ongoing support, reach **Care Connections™** at **214-506-0691** or **Dominique@amindfulresource.org**.