What to say

Conversation starters, listening, and offering help you can actually give.

Conversation starters

- “Hi, my name is ____. How are you doing today?”
- “Would you like something to eat or a warm drink?”
- “Is there something you need right now — a meal, a place to sleep, a ride?”
- “I don’t have all the answers, but I can help you find the next place to call.”
- “Would you like to look at gfhelp.org together, or call 211 with me?”
- “You are not forgotten.”

How to listen

- Give them time. Don’t jump in with advice.
- Repeat back what you heard: “It sounds like you need a place tonight.”
- Don’t interrogate. They don’t owe you their story.
- Sit or stand at the same level when you can.
- If they don’t want to talk, that’s okay. You can still offer a meal or a number.

Phrases to avoid

- “Why don’t you just get a job?” or “Have you tried harder?”
- “You don’t look homeless.”
- “I’ll take care of everything,” or “I promise you’ll have a bed tonight,” unless you have already confirmed it.
- “This is God’s way of teaching you a lesson.”
- “You can stay with me” — only if you truly mean it, have thought it through, and have a plan. A casual offer can be unsafe for both of you.
- “At least you have…”
- Questions that shame, such as “Are you using?” or “Where is your family?”

Offer help you can actually give

- Be specific: “I can give you a ride to the Men’s Shelter right now,” not “Let me know if you need anything.”
- If you don’t know, say so: “I don’t know if they have a bed. We can call together.”
- Don’t promise rent, a job, or ongoing housing unless your church already has a real way to do that.
- When you leave, leave them with a clear next step: a phone number, the gfhelp.org card, or a time you will follow up — and then do it.

If they say no

Thank them. Leave the door open: “If you change your mind, 211 and gfhelp.org are there.” Don’t argue, and don’t withhold a meal because they declined a prayer or a church service.

If this is a crisis

If they talk about suicide or wanting to die, stay with them if it is safe, and call 988 or 911. Veterans can dial 988, then press 1. Voices of Hope is 406-453-4357, free and private. Or text MT to 741741.