

Theology for Life

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A photograph of a person with dark hair, seen from the back, sitting on a windowsill and looking out a large window. The view outside the window is a bright, snowy landscape. The interior is dark, and the person is wearing a light-colored jacket.

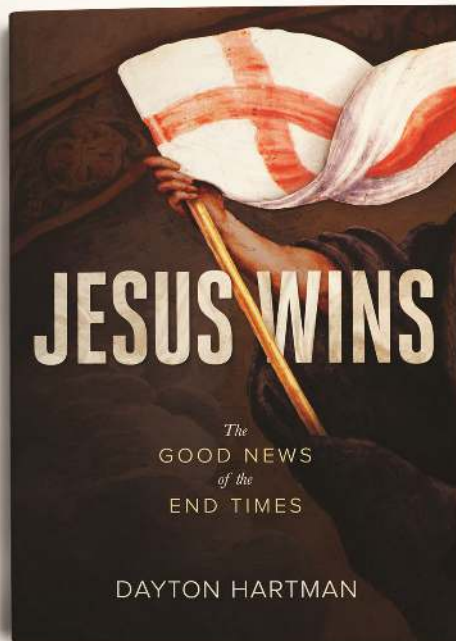
Facing Grief, Illness, and Loss

Inside this Issue...

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Editor's Corner

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Grief and illness are two topics that hit close to home for me personally. There have been many times both in my childhood and as an adult where grief and illness have both visited me, my family, and my friends. My grandfather died in 2001 of cancer of the esophagus. He found out about his cancer two months before his death. In the last month of his life, he gave up and died shortly after that. There has been deep pain especially in my childhood that has required counseling and lots of help from godly saints over the years.

When my wife and I first met about twelve years ago now, we came from homes deeply broken. As you'll read in this issue when she shares her story, her father was murdered in a double-murder-suicide over twenty years ago, and her mother died of stage four cancer thirteen years ago. About one year before we met her mother died. I was going through my own issues with my parents (as well as other issues in my life), but Sarah was going through the pain of losing her mother and being the oldest child in the family and caring for her three younger siblings.

Grief and illness are the byproducts of living in a fallen world. Thankfully, however, grief is not the last word; Jesus is. The death and resurrection of Jesus has ushered in the Kingdom of God—both now in the present and at His return—in the fullest sense of the word. Theologians call this the “already and not yet” of the Kingdom of God. You and I live in a world where grief and illness reside. In Heaven, however, there will be no more tears, no more grief, and no more illness.

In the gospel we see Jesus—the one who bore our grief in our place for our sins (Isaiah 53:4). Jesus knows fully well what we are going through, as He is like us and unlike us. He is utterly sinless, and we are not. He bore the full weight of the fury of God the Father in our place so we could be forgiven and made new creations in Christ (2nd Corinthians 5:7). This is what is so amazing about Jesus—that we can approach Him boldly because He knows exactly what we are going through and yet did not sin (Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews

4:14-16).

As you consider your own grief and heartache, take comfort in the High Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' role as our High Priest means that He sees, knows, and understands us through and through. Not only that, He also longs to comfort you in whatever you are going through today. While in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus tells the disciples (and us) that He is going to prepare a place for them/us (John 14:3) and will send the Holy Spirit the Comforter (John 14:26). All that means as a Christian is that you have the full weight of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—working to accomplish the ends for which you were saved. This is for the glory of God that will be spread among the nations by His grace.

You may not think of your grief in this way, but there is going to come a time in your life when the Lord is going to use this season of your grief in the lives of others. God is not distant from you. Please understand that God the Father sent forth God the Son—Jesus—to die the death you deserve so your grief would not last forever. Why? Because He loves you. Apart from the Lord Jesus, you would experience unending grief; but with Jesus, you have hope. Therefore, we as Christians do not grieve as those without hope (1st Thessalonians 4:13).

Wherever you are at today—whether you just had a friend or family member die, or some other situation is upon you—it is my prayer that you will be comforted, instructed, and challenged to minister to those facing grief and illness. We all know people (perhaps ourselves or others around us) that are going through challenging times. We all also need one another in our local churches.

With this issue of *Theology for Life*, we hope you are helped, but most importantly pointed to the Lord Jesus. It was He alone who bore all grief (yours and mine) so that our hope is now in the rock-solid promises of the Word of God and supremely in the treasure trove of finished and sufficient work of the Lord Jesus.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

GriefShare: A Ministry for Loss, Grief, and Suffering

An Interview with Nancy Guthrie

By Dave Jenkins



Nancy Guthrie and her husband, David, are the co-hosts of the GriefShare video series used in more than 10,000 churches nationwide and also host Respite Retreats for couples who have experienced the death of a child. She is also the host of *Help Me Teach the Bible*, a podcast of the Gospel Coalition.

ples who have experienced the death of a child. She is also the host of *Help Me Teach the Bible*, a podcast of the Gospel Coalition.

T4L: Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with *Theology for Life Magazine*, Nancy. Can you tell us a bit about yourself, including the current ministries you are involved in?

Nancy Guthrie: I live in Nashville with my husband, David. We are members of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Franklin. My husband produces excellent, Christ

-centered musicals for kids through his company, Little Big Stuff Music, which is based in our home. Our son, Matt, works with him so it is fun for all three of us to work together at our house day-by-day.

We also have two other children, a daughter, Hope, and a son, Gabriel, who both lived for only six months. We currently host weekend retreats for couples who have lost children called *Respite Retreats*. Couples come from all over the country who have experienced this sorrow and find great comfort in being with eleven other couples who understand.

"A great deal of wisdom is presented on the videos by the pastors, counselors, and people who have experienced the loss of a loved one."

T4L: That's amazing! A very needed ministry, for sure. It's my understanding that you are also involved in another counseling-type ministry. Can you tell us about the ministry of GriefShare and your role within this ministry?

Nancy Guthrie: GriefShare is a 13-week video curriculum used by over 12,000 churches around the country for small group ministry to grieving people. We are grateful that a number of years ago the creators of GriefShare (Church Initiatives), based in Wake Forest, NC, asked us to host the videos. A great deal of wisdom is presented on the videos by pastors, counselors, and people who have experienced the loss of a loved one. And in the groups grieving people find companionship with others who are working through grief.

T4L: Grief and loss are such difficult subjects to deal with, whether as someone first-hand experiencing them, or a friend/family member of that person. When it comes to ministering to those experiencing loss what are some of the best ways to minister to them, and what are some ways we should avoid?

Nancy Guthrie: I can boil it down to four words: *Show up, speak up*. Sometimes we avoid people who are grieving because we think they probably want to be alone or want to be with people they know better than us. But it means a great deal for people—even people we don't know all that well—to care enough about our loss to show up. It says, "The person you love and the loss you are experiencing is worth me stopping what I'm doing to enter in." We're also afraid of saying the wrong thing to people who are grieving and so sometimes we say nothing.

But grieving people aren't expecting us to say something that will fix the pain or give them a perspective about it that they hadn't thought of. They just want to know

they are *not alone* and that other people are willing to enter into their sorrow with them. Sometimes the best thing to say can simply be, “I don’t know what to say, but I’m sad with you.”

T4L: As we consider those who may be grieving the loss of their spouse, family members, or a friend, how can the local church and/or church-members best come alongside them to minister the grace of God to them?

Nancy Guthrie: Rather than say, “Call us if you need us”, it is far better to figure out what they need and *just do it*. In the confusion of grief, sometimes you don’t know what you need. You just need people to come in close and figure out what the needs are and do what is needed. You need people who are willing to help shoulder the load. Sometimes what grieving people need is for someone to show up and clean the bathrooms, or do the laundry, or mow the lawn. But they are never going to call anyone who has said, “Call us if you need us”, and ask them to do those things.

“No one likes to have Romans 8:28 quoted
at them.”

T4L: That’s very true. Even those dealing with grief and pain (or perhaps especially those people) don’t want to be “a burden” to those around them. Sometimes we forget that just because they don’t “ask us”, doesn’t mean that they don’t need us. Loss, grief, and suffering not only affect people differently but they also can change the way people interact with the world around them. How can Christians be a good caring, godly friends to those experiencing these life-changing circumstances?

Nancy Guthrie: It means a lot to have friends who are willing to give us the time and space to simply be sad for a while—maybe a good long while. When you lose someone you love, it makes sense that you would be sad. Sadness is not the enemy. *Tears are not the enemy*. You esteem our grief and the value of the person who died when you don’t try to rush us to feel better and get back to “normal”, but rather recognize that the pain might get worse for us before it gets better and that we may never be exactly the people we were before.

T4L: So true. The Bible even tells us to “weep with those who weep”—something that our Western culture has a difficult time with. So, how do we begin to see the circumstances of our lives, even those that are genuinely challenging, as opportunities to know more of God’s goodness, His character, and to grow in thankfulness for His

grace?

Nancy Guthrie: No one likes to have Romans 8:28 quoted *at* them. When someone does that it feels to us like we should be *happy* this hard thing is happening. It diminishes our loss or difficulty. But even if we don't want someone to quote it at us, aren't we so glad this verse is in the Bible! It fills us with the confidence that the worst things that happen to us, if we are joined to Christ by faith, are not meaningless but are purposeful.

And we're not left to try to figure out what the "good" is that God intends to cause all things to work together toward. It is in the very next verse. The "good" that God intends in "all things" is that we would be *conformed* to the image of His Son. He's using the worst things we can imagine to cause us to look and think and act more like Christ, to make us beautiful like Christ. That is genuine hope to hold on to in hardship.

T4L: That is an excellent point! Even when we face the trials of this life, we know that there is always a *hope* that we can hold onto...and His name is Jesus. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Nancy.

The Gift of Lament

By Ernie Baker

***“Be pleased,
O LORD, to
deliver me! O
LORD, make
haste to help
me!”***

***“In my dis-
tress I called
upon the
LORD; to my
God I cried
for help.”***

***“Hear, O
LORD, when I
cry aloud....”***

‘Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help....’

***“Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not
your peace at my tears!”***

Can you relate to these pleas? Humans are sufferers. Life is not the way it is supposed to be. Life on planet Earth is often broken as we seek times of peace. Sin that originated in the Garden has affected everything. Often relationships are



strained and loved ones die. Scripture is brutally honest about all of this, and so our gracious God gives us an outlet: the gift of lament before the throne of the Almighty. But what does it mean? Lament can be defined as, “a crying out in grief”, “to express sorrow”, “to mourn aloud”.

Humans were not made to bear life alone, but to be in relationship to our Creator. So, cry out to him in your time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16). Crying out to the Lord is modeled for us by the writers of Scripture and encouraged by the LORD. This has many implications. There is actually a whole book about lamenting called *Lamentations*, written by the “weeping prophet”, Jeremiah. So remember in your anguish that you are not alone. Many have felt the heart-wrenching pain and have modeled for you how to turn to your Creator. What a privilege and how kind of our Lord!

Allow me to take you to a personal favorite of proper lament. Psalms 42 and 43 are beautiful yet heart-wrenching examples of lament in times of intense pain. The anguish can be felt as you read the questions that come from the soul of this son of Korah.

Proper Lament Remembers

The writer says, “These things I remember, as I pour out my soul...” (Psalm 42:4). The Psalmist is reflecting on how worship used to be. What are you remembering? A birthday? Christmas the way it used to be? An anniversary that stirs memories in your mind?

I am writing this on my brother’s birthday. My brother died “prematurely” from a massive heart attack a few years ago at age 52. Unfortunately, this was the culmination of a sad life. I am remembering and reflecting. My brother’s life has raised many “why” questions for me, and this is modeled for us in these Psalms as well. The Psalmist not only reflects but also asks questions.

Proper Lament Can Ask “Why?”

“I say to God, my rock: why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” (Psalm 42:9). The writer believes he is experiencing abandonment by none other than God! Have you thought that? Where is God in the midst of this pain? Am I being punished? Why does the Lord seem silent? These are questions the Psalmists ask repeatedly, and they are common to humans.

A number of years ago I was involved in counseling after the Virginia Tech University massacre where 32 people were killed, and 17 others were wounded. As we counseled hundreds we were asked repeatedly, “Why Blacksburg?” “Why is my friend

dead but I'm not?" "Why here?" "Why now?"

The famous pastor Charles Spurgeon also wrestled with this. In his *Treasury of David* he wrote, "Faith is allowed to enquire of her God the causes of his displeasure, and she is even permitted to expostulate with him and put him in mind of his promises, and ask why apparently they are not fulfilled. If the Lord indeed be our refuge, when we find no refuge, it is time to be raising the question, 'why is this?'"

Many would say it is not proper to ask "why" questions of God. However, I

would argue that has to be wrong since the ultimate author of these Psalms is God Himself.

He is helping the author articulate his pain.

We believe that God guides the writers of

Scripture and gives them the very words to

write. In other words, the Lord is helping him

articulate his pain. And even our Lord Himself

moaned on the cross, "My God, My God, Why

have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Have

you learned how to ask "why?" properly? He

does not stop with "why?" though. As he laments he remembers who God is and this comforts the soul.

Proper Lament Remembers There is a God Who is Real

The hero of this Psalm is actually the God of the universe. It would be easy to get lost in the sadness and the pathos of the Psalm and not see that in 16 verses there are at least 17 truths about who God is! He is the living God (Psalm 42:1) of "steadfast love" (Psalm 42:8), and the One who gives songs in the night (Psalm 42:8). He is our "rock" in the midst of turmoil (Psalm 42:9). He is the God of justice (43:1). In other words, those who have hurt you will be held accountable. We are also blessed that in the darkness He sends out "light" and "truth" (Psalm 43:3). There are many other statements about who the LORD is beyond these.

This lamenter has a robust view of God. In the midst of your sorrow, do you remember there is a living God? There is nothing like pain and anguish to reveal the true depth of your belief system. Have you stored up good theology for times of affliction and questioning? Are you disciplining yourself to remember truth about the character of your Lord?

Proper Lament Clings to the Promise That There is Always Hope

Years ago, Jerry Bridges defined a life of trust this way: *“Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us.”* The writer does this as he fights with his soul to remember there is a future. “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him...” (Psalm 42:5). Even if the near future looks bleak there is always an eternal future so “let your gaze break through to eternity”. The rest of life on the planet may seem unbearable, but discipline your mind that heaven is real and someday (sooner than you think) all tears will be gone.

He not only clings to this promise, but all through these Psalms it is evident he practices telling his soul other truths as well. This is shown when he calls the LORD “*my God*” in numerous places, “My rock” (Psalm 42:9), and he is the “refuge” (Psalm 43:2). There are many truths he is repeating to his hurting soul.

Please note that putting into practice Bridges’ definition of trust is different from reciting the Bible to yourself or even repeating a verse repeatedly in your head. This would be treating Bible verses as if they are mere mantras. In reality, it is fighting with your soul to choose to believe truth in the midst of chaos. It can

“Are you fighting with your soul to believe truth?”

happen the first time you remind your soul of truth if you tell your soul you believe it. However, it will probably mean that 2 minutes later you have to do it again. Are you fighting with your soul to believe truth? How are you doing believing there is a future? This all sounds good in theory, but how do you do it?

Practical Ideas for Practicing Lament

How about following the pattern of this Psalm and pray your own lament back to the Lord. In other words, put the details of your sorrows and questions into the Psalm. A variation of this idea would be to write out your own lament Psalm to the Lord. If you are like me, sometimes I do not even know what to say to the Lord because I am hurting so much. Let this Psalm or another lament Psalm guide your written prayer and help you articulate your pain. Try walking and lamenting, or getting on your knees as you lament. Go back through these two chapters and find as many

attributes of God as possible. Then, pray them back to the Lord and thank Him for who he is in the midst of your pain. Memorize Jerry Bridges' definition of trust and choose some of the promises of Scripture to fight with your soul to believe and cling to in the midst of the darkness.

Closing Prayer

Father, You are intimately acquainted with all of our ways, so You know the ones who are reading this. May each learn to walk closely with You in the midst of suffering. Help us as we practice proper lamenting before You. Please give us strength to fight with our souls to remember Your character and other rich promises of Scripture. We all thank You for the gift of lament and that we do not need to walk through life alone. We come before You in the name of the One who understands pain and suffering. Amen.

What *Not* to Say to Your Friend with Cancer (and What to Say Instead)

By Marissa Henley



I spent most of my young adult years quoting Romans 8:28 to friends and family who were suffering.

This promise from God's Word has always been one of my favorite verses: "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*" (ESV). For years, the truth of God's sovereignty over all circumstances has been a rock I can cling to, no matter what life brings. I've often wielded this truth like a sword when I felt that someone might be slipping in their trust as they walked through suffering.

Then I was diagnosed with a rare, aggressive cancer called angiosarcoma the day before my 34th birthday. I had three young children—ages 6, 4, and 18 months—and the prognosis wasn't encouraging. As I walked through the months of intense treatment and years of uncertainty which followed, I treasured the truth of God's sovereignty even more than before. But hearing others tell me

“God has a plan” didn’t bring comfort in my pain.

I’m not alone in feeling this way. In fact, when I talk to cancer patients and survivors about the unhelpful words they’ve heard from friends, sentiments like “God has a plan” and “God uses everything for good” top the list. Every single cancer survivor I know has heard these words from friends. We’re saying it often, but it’s failing to provide comfort to our friends with cancer.

As I wrestled with an uncertain future following my cancer diagnosis, I found comfort in knowing that God had good plans for my family and me. I knew that not even the most aggressive cancer or the worst prognosis could thwart His purposes for us. Clinging to that truth kept me from falling into despair, but it didn’t guarantee the outcome I was hoping for. I knew His ways were (are) not my ways (Isaiah 55:8).

“Yes, God has a plan and works all things together for the good of His children.”

When the Holy Spirit applied this truth of God’s Word to my heart, it brought comfort and peace. But when my friends said, “God has a plan” it felt like they were saying, “It will all be okay.” I was grieving, knowing that life would never be the same if I survived and that my loved ones’ lives would be tragically altered if I died. I didn’t need to hear that it would all be okay. I needed friends who understood the gravity of my diagnosis.

Why Romans 8:28 Doesn’t Comfort Our Hurting Friends

Yes, God has a plan and works all things together for the good of His children. However, I’d encourage you to not let these be the first words that pop out of your mouth when supporting a friend with cancer. Here’s why.

First, quoting Romans 8:28 or similar sentiments will make your friend feel like you’re trying to fix her problem rather than seeking to understand her pain. We often turn to Romans 8:28 because we see our friend’s heartache and think, “I have an answer for this.” We hope our answer will ease his/her suffering or bolster his/her faith as he/she endures it. But when a friend faces a life-threatening illness, he/she needs compassionate friends, not pedantic answers.

Second, your friend will feel like you’re dismissing his/her pain or rushing his/her grief. In his/her mind, he/she will hear you saying, “You must have forgotten that God is sovereign—otherwise you wouldn’t be so upset.” God’s sovereignty

might be giving him/her the courage to get out of bed in the morning, but it doesn't take away his/her pain. Even when we trust that God's plans are good, our difficult circumstances cause us to cry out in pain and lament. As Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, we can also weep with our friends (John 11:35). Your friend needs you to sit with him/her in his/her sadness or fear, acknowledge his/her pain, and cry with him/her.

Most importantly, Romans 8:28 will sound like you're preaching at him/her rather than comforting him/her. If giving comfort is our goal, we need to choose verses that will meet that objective. Even though Romans 8:28 is inerrant, infallible, and unconditionally true, it's not the best Scripture to turn to first in every situation. There are reasons why we often hear the same passages used repeatedly at weddings, and we hear different passages at funerals. Have you ever heard a pastor launch into a homily from Judges as a bride and groom stand before him? Certain Scriptures are most appropriate in certain situations.

I'm not saying we shouldn't share Bible verses with our hurting friends. After we've listened compassionately, we should prayerfully consider how to speak words of comfort and support. Our friend needs to be reminded of God's promises, and there is nothing more powerful than Scripture. His living and active Word gives strength to weary hearts (see Hebrew 4:12, Isaiah 40:29). But rather than saying that God has a plan, I recommend sharing verses that communicate God's presence and care.

Verses that Bring Comfort

The Scriptures that brought me the most comfort as I battled cancer reminded me that God knew my suffering, cared for me in it, and provided a safe refuge from the storm. The Psalms often provided this balm for my hurting soul. When your friend with cancer is overwhelmed, anxious, or sad, try sharing one of these promises.

God knows his/her suffering. Every one of his/her tears is seen by Him. "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" (Psalm 56:8). God is present with him/her in his/her suffering. He/she is never alone. "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). God is a refuge in the midst of her suffering. She/he is safely in His hands. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2).

God is the strength he/she needs to endure her suffering. She/he has the help

of the One who created the heavens and the earth. “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2).

God is faithful in all circumstances. She/he can have confidence in His promises. “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23). God will give him/her His perfect peace. She/he can anchor his/her soul to the everlasting Rock. “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock” (Isaiah 26:3-4).

Our friends may run quickly to Romans 8:28 for comfort, or they may end up there as they process their pain with the Lord. We can trust the Spirit’s timing as He works in the hearts of His children. In the meantime, let’s be friends who walk prayerfully and compassionately alongside our friends with cancer (and/or other life-threatening illnesses). This isn’t easy, and we will make missteps along the way. We can trust the One who loves our friends perfectly to use us as His instruments of comfort and care.

Susie Spurgeon: The Help and Support behind Charles

An Interview with Ray Rhodes, Jr.

By Dave Jenkins



Ray Rhodes, Jr. serves as founding pastor of Grace Community Church of Dawsonville, GA and as president of Nourished in the Word Ministries. He has served four congregations over three decades of pastoral ministry, and for

fifteen years, he has led Nourished in the Word. Ray has published several books and holds theological degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min.). He is married to Lori, and they are blessed with six daughters and four grandchildren. Ray has long been a Spurgeon enthusiast, and his doctoral thesis focused on the marriage and spirituality of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon.

T4L: Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with *Theology for Life Magazine*, Ray. Can you tell us a bit about yourself, including the current ministries

you are involved in?

Ray: Hi Dave, I am happy to be with you today. I have been married to Lori for 31 years now; we have six daughters, two son-in-laws, and four grandchildren. I enjoy reading, writing, and visiting Southern Seminary. I am a pastor and an itinerant conference/retreat preacher/teacher. What that means is that my church allows me to minister at other churches over the course of each year. With the release of *Susie*, I also look forward to speaking for various book events. As a pastor, I am an expository preacher and I am blessed to serve a lovely congregation.

T4L: As one of the experts on Susie Spurgeon, can you tell us how she supported, helped, and encouraged Charles during seasons when he faced depression?

Ray: Depression is hard on both the depressed person and their family and friends. Therefore, Susie felt the pain of Charles' sorrows, and at times, she wept with him. So, I think that is part of it; Susie identified with her husband—she didn't treat him as some sort of outcast, but she entered into his suffering and didn't push him away when his heart was sad. She also prayed for him. She prayed for him before he preached, as he travelled, and throughout his sufferings, both mental and physical.

Susie genuinely loved Charles; therefore, she wanted to help him and much of that help came as she interceded on his behalf. Susie also read to Charles when he was depressed. Sometimes the poetry of George Herbert was just what he needed to lift his spirits. But, perhaps best of all, she supported him. She wanted him to do his work, which often necessitated travel from home. She missed him, but she encouraged him onward in his ministry. He was not worried while he was away from home that Susie was growing bitter due to his absence. She communicated lovingly to him by writing letters to him when he travelled. She was a helper to Charles—she identified with him, prayed for him, loved him, read to him, and supported him.

T4L: From certain historical documents, we know that Susie faced health issues of her own. What were those health issues and how did she help keep the home in order for Charles, despite them?

Ray: The specifics of Susie's health issues are unknown. However, with almost absolute certainty, I can say that her health problems were gynecological in nature. The most famed gynecologist of the day did surgery on her, and after having twins early in her marriage to Charles, she never had children again. The gynecological root of her health problems resulted in Susie experiencing pain throughout her body.

As for the Spurgeon home, Susie managed it well. After a couple of years of

marriage, Charles and Susie hired household servants to help attend to the needs of their increasingly busy household. These domestic employess grew in number over the years and by 1892, at least nine people were employed (cooks, dressmakers, general servants, gardeners, etc). Both Charles and Susie had help with their home. Due to the nature of Charles's work, and the poor health of both Charles and Susie, they had to have help to keep their busy home open.

T4L: That sounds quite challenging. Having household help must have been a great blessing to both of them. How did Charles Spurgeon disciple Susie to deal with suffering?

Ray: Charles attended to Susie's spiritual needs from the earliest days of their relationship. He ministered to her by providing good literature for her to read—such as books by John Bunyan and Thomas Brooks. He encouraged her to engage in active service for Christ.

After her sickness, Charles continued to encourage Susie to serve the Lord by doing what she could for His kingdom. Ultimately, Susie gave oversight to “Mrs. Spurgeon's Book Fund”, through which she gave away 200,000 books (1875-1903). Susie read the Bible, read good books, and served God faithfully. Perhaps the best way that Charles helped Susie to deal with her suffering was by example. He served her, he cared for her. He was thoughtful to her needs, made sure that she had the help that she needed, prayed for and with her, and wrote her every day when he was away from home. His letters are instructive and spurred her onward in the Christian life.

T4L: That's an excellent example that our pastors should consider following today. You've written about Susie as a 'great suffer'. How did she endured intense physical pain and persevere through her own trials and still find time to serve the Lord?

Ray: Great question. Susie used her time wisely—meaning that when she was strong and able enough to work, she was efficient. She also had help; her main assistant with the Book Fund was Elizabeth Thorne, her dear friend. Elizabeth actually took over the fund after Susie died. As well, as previously mentioned, Susie had a lot of help around the house with household servants. She was disciplined with her devotional times; she read the Bible through each year and mediated on smaller chunks of Scripture.

But still, it is amazing what she did. She interacted with pastors, answering numerous—sometimes hundreds of— letters each month, kept a detailed accounting ledger of all money and books that came in and that were distributed, and

chose the books that she mailed. She became a prolific author, was an editor, and she even planted a church. The simple answer is that God gave her strength and discipline and did through her the impossible in human strength. Susie also had a supportive and loving husband who encouraged her along the way, and sometimes took part of her responsibilities and covered them himself.

T4L: I think very few of us can actually understand just what it took to press on like Susie did. It amazes me that she was able to do *so much*, despite her physical pain and suffering. So, Ray, what can Christians today learn from Susie, to help them face loss and grief themselves?

Ray: I think that Susie would say to all suffering Christians, “Don’t quit. Do all that you can for Christ, while you can. Don’t complain, but thank God for His innumerable blessings.” Susie would also encourage us to trust God through the storms, to look for evidences of His grace, and to press forward in life. Susie’s earthly faithfulness was also directly connected to her heavenly vision. She longed for Heaven and allowed her future hope to motivate, encourage, and enable her through her sufferings.

T4L: An excellent point. We would do well to follow her example in looking heavenward. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Ray.

Ray: Dave, it’s been great being with you!

A Three-Pronged Approach to Ministering to Grieving People

By Joey Tomlinson

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15; ESV).

When ministering to someone who is grieving, please don't be like Job's friends. They were full of good advice, counsel, and were well-meaning. If you know the story you know that, in the end, the Lord rebuked them for their approach to counseling Job. I am a pastor and biblical counselor at my local church. I spend a large amount of my time with grieving people in the counseling office, conducting funerals, or doing hospital visits. In this article, my aim is to share what I am learning as I serve, and equip you for the time the Lord allows you to minister to and be there for someone struggling with grief. Your response to them in their suffering is a weighty matter that should be given careful consideration.

If you have someone in your life



grieving or struggling with an illness, I want to commend that you do one thing with them for a season: *weep*. Don't correct their theology, don't try to figure out what sin they may or may not have committed. Don't quote Job 1:21 to them. Just sit with them and weep. Don't tell them you understand what they're going through (even if you do). Don't make the situation about you and share with them about your own struggles. Don't remind them that their struggle is a 'light momentary affliction' (2nd Corinthians 4:17). Just be quiet and weep. Mourn. Don't move a muscle. Sitting still and weeping with those who weep does at least three things:

1. It acknowledges God's ordained seasons of life (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, ESV).

*For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

2. It shows compassion and care.

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35, ESV). Jesus wept after spending time with Mary and Martha. He was just a few minutes away from raising Lazarus from the dead. He was going to see His friend again, but Jesus, in His humanity, showed great compassion for those who suffered by weeping, and we have much to learn from His kindness and compassion.

3. It allows us to listen well so that when the time comes, we may speak well.

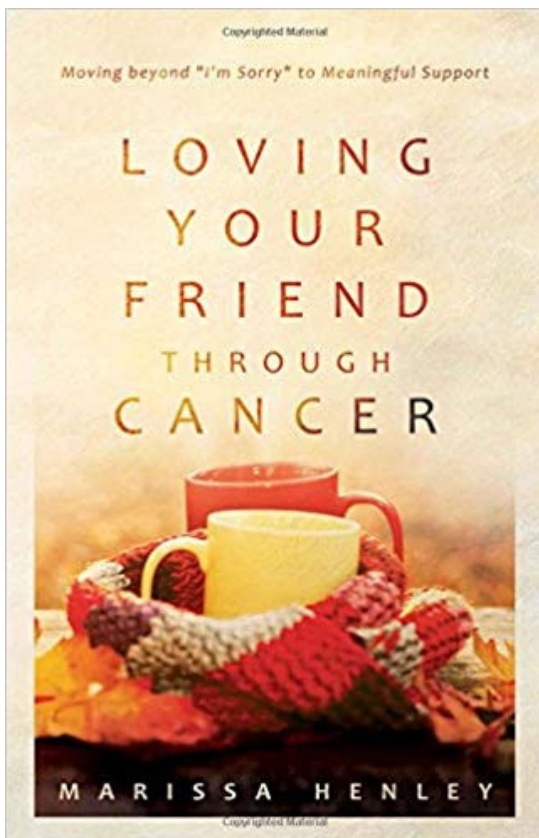
James speaks of being quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). When we take time to mourn and just listen, not only do we give an opportunity for suffer-

ers to process without judgment, but we learn how best to respond to them in the proper time (think season). We cannot possibly know how others process grief. All people process differently. We don't know what they're thinking. We don't know where their heads are at (where they are mentally). We don't know what is helpful for them to hear/not hear. We must listen. We must listen broadly and generously. We must listen without judgment. We must listen *with compassion*. When we listen well, we learn how best to honor Christ in our response to the sufferer, and we can trust that the Holy Spirit will use us to comfort them. So, please be quiet, weep, listen, and pray with those who are grieving.

Loving Your Friend through Cancer: Moving beyond “I’m Sorry” to Meaningful Support

An Interview with Marissa Henley

By Dave Jenkins



Marissa Henley, the author of *Loving Your Friend through Cancer: Moving beyond “I’m Sorry” to Meaningful Support*, loves to write and speak about suffering and God’s character. She lives in Arkansas with her husband, three kids, and one disobedient dog. She’d love to connect with you at www.marissahenley.com.

T4L: Hello, Marissa! Can you please tell us about your life, marriage, and ministry?

Marissa: I’ve been married for twenty years to my high school sweetheart, Noel, and we have three kids. Lately, I’ve been working to spread the word about *Loving Your Friend through Cancer*, but

I also do some other things. I write a weekly devotional on my blog called “No Matter What Monday”. It gives us a truth about God’s character to cling to, no matter what our week brings. I’m also involved with ministry to women in my local church, and I’m prayerfully considering what God has for me to do next.

T4L: Can you please tell us a bit about your book, *Loving Your Friend through Cancer: Moving beyond “I’m Sorry” to Meaningful Support*, why you wrote it, and how you hope it is received?

Marissa: I’m a cancer survivor—I battled a rare cancer called angiosarcoma about eight years ago. And I often get questions from friends when their friends are diagnosed. They want to know how to support their friends, what to say, what not to say, and how to help. After having several of those conversations, I realized people want to know—and need to know—this information! I hope this book will be a helpful resource for the body of Christ as we strive to walk alongside our friends with cancer well.

T4L: You write that every person is different, every family is different, and every cancer is different. *That’s an important point.* How can we begin to care for our family, or even our friends or fellow church members, who may have cancer?

Marissa: This was one challenging part of writing the book, knowing that every situation will be different. When I was diagnosed, I had young children—my kids were 6, 4, and 18 months old. Most of my treatment took place in another state, so we had a lot of logistical challenges. We needed a great deal of help, and that isn’t typical of every situation. So I’d encourage people to consider your friend’s needs, consider the closeness of your relationship to her (or him), and ask God how He wants you to help in her (his) situation.

Evaluating the closeness of your relationship is an important step. You may offer to do something that’s too intimate for your friendship, or conversely, you might think that you aren’t close enough to be able to serve her/him. Whether you’re a close friend or an acquaintance, you *do* have a role to play in her/his support network.

T4L: What long-term strategies can pastors and others caring for people living with cancer take to help walk with people living with cancer?

Marissa: I think one of the most important things that we can do as Christian friends would be to improve our *listening skills*. This is something I’m still working on myself, but one of the verses I try to remind myself of often is Proverbs 10:19. It says, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his

lips is prudent.”

One of the questions I hear the most on the topic is, “How can I avoid saying the wrong thing to my friend with cancer?” And this is a real problem—often we’re saying the wrong thing and not helping our friends. One of the ways to avoid saying the wrong thing is to just keep our mouths shut and listen.

So it’s important to sit with our friends in their pain, listen to them, and not feel like we need to have an answer for everything they’re feeling. That’s hard for me, because there are some great answers in God’s Word! Sometimes I’m eager to rush my friend who’s hurting to a place of deeper trust and dependence on Christ so she will feel better.

We need to encourage our friend to trust God, and we know that He will use her/his suffering to deepen her/his faith. He did that for me in my suffering. But that is going to be a lengthy process—probably months or even years. As the Lord is doing that, we need to be willing to listen to our friend without having all the answers. Building our listening skills is the most important thing we can do to prepare to be a friend to someone with cancer.

In addition to becoming better listeners, we need to make sure we’re living with enough margin in our lives so that we’re able to serve others. I know sometimes I can get my schedule so booked that when my car runs low on gas, I start to panic because I don’t have time to stop and fill the tank. And that is a problem! If I don’t have time to stop for gas, I don’t have time to take a meal to someone or visit a friend in the hospital.

Lastly, we need to know what the Bible says about suffering and community. That way, when difficult things happen, we understand the importance of rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn. We understand our role as the body of Christ and the importance of showing up for those who are sick and suffering. Also, knowing what the Bible says about suffering will help us know how to encourage them with the truth of God’s Word and not buy into the false ideas that often come up about suffering, even in Christian circles.

T4L: Great point! One can never go wrong with allowing the Bible to be his/her guide in responses to those in suffering. What are some of the struggles you faced in dealing with your cancer yourself?

Marissa: Because of my cancer treatment, I ended up living in Houston two out of every three weeks for several months while receiving chemo on a clinical trial. Then I spent another five weeks straight receiving radiation there as well. My husband and three young kids were back home in Arkansas. So we needed a lot of help with the kids, and we needed a lot of food. We had meals three times a week for about 8

months. Our church family was small, so a friend set up a rotation for our church, my parents' church, and then other friends and neighbors. We had a small army of people committed to feeding us, and we were so thankful!

In addition to the logistical struggles, there were also emotional struggles. My prognosis wasn't good, and I didn't expect to live very long. I thought I would make it through that first battle, but I expected the cancer to come back quickly and take my life while my kids were still little. I still can't believe I'm here in 2018—I definitely didn't think I'd have this many years with my family. It's a surreal experience living in a year you didn't think you'd see. But back in 2010-2011, when I didn't think I'd live this long, I really had to wrestle through what that could mean for my family. I wasn't afraid to die, but I was scared for my kids. I didn't want that to be their story—losing their mom at a young age.

I was confident in God's goodness, faithfulness, and sovereignty, but I knew that didn't guarantee the outcome I wanted. It was hard to wrestle through my emotions, and I needed close friends who would listen to me say difficult things. I needed to say things like, "If I don't make it, I want my husband to remarry quickly, and don't get in the way of that." I can't imagine how hard that was for my friends to hear. But as a young 34-year-old mom with angiosarcoma, I needed friends to sit and cry with me and listen to me wrestle through those difficult emotions.

It was hard, but the Lord gave me so much comfort and peace during that time. He sustained me and gave me an even greater confidence in His character. Even though I couldn't fathom what life could look like for my kids if I didn't survive, I knew He would provide for them and continue to be good and faithful to them. I never despaired because the Holy Spirit was at work in my heart, speaking those words of comfort and bringing scriptures to my mind.

T4L: Wow! I can't even fathom what that must have been like to go through all that. What kinds of questions should pastor and church members ask that demonstrate care and concern to those living with cancer?

Marissa: I think we need to be really careful with our questions, and there are a couple of things that I'd recommend we think about before we ask a question.

First, we need to ask ourselves if the question communicates concern or curiosity. This is hard for me, because I love information. If a friend is going through something, especially if it's medical, I want to know everything. I want to hear what her doctor said, what her side effects will be, and what her prognosis is. But those questions are all to satisfy my need for information. If I'm there to serve her, I need to be asking questions that will show her my concern, not satisfy my curiosity. Supporting her should be my only goal.

I shouldn't be asking, "What did your doctor say about your chances for survival?" unless I'm a close friend asking it very carefully. It can come across as being insensitive or even offensive to our friend with cancer. But if we ask, "How are you coping with the news of your cancer diagnosis?" that question will demonstrate our caring and concern. So let's be careful with the questions we're asking and how we're wording them.

The other thing I'd mention about questions is to consider the personal nature of our questions and the closeness of our relationship. Some people share medical details openly; others are more private. If you've seen your friend openly share these details on a blog or on social media, she's probably okay with talking about it. But generally speaking, a good rule of thumb is: if this is a question you would have asked before cancer, it's probably fine to ask about it now. If you shared about struggles in your marriage before cancer, it's okay to ask about how her marriage is weathering this storm. If it's not something you would have asked before cancer, it's not a good idea to ask now.

My favorite question to ask my friends with cancer is, "How are you *today*?" I say this instead of "How are you?" because sometimes when someone is going through something difficult, the way we ask that is a very loaded question. We might tilt our head, scrunch up our face, and ask the question loaded with meaning. They know what we're asking—we're asking them to pour out all the details of their suffering. But if we ask, "How are you today?" they can answer it in any way they choose. They can tell us about the rough week they're having, or they can tell us what they had for lunch. That will give us a clue about what they feel like discussing, and we can follow their lead from there.

T4L: That's very insightful. Thank you for that tip. Say a friend or family member just got the news that they have a chronic or terminal illness and shared it with you or me. What would be an appropriate and caring response be to this news?

Marissa: I would start by acknowledging how terrible the news is and telling them that you're sorry. Try to fight any temptation to minimize the pain they're going through or put a "positive spin" on it. I've heard another author say to avoid saying any sentence that starts with "At least". Don't say, "At least they caught it early", or "At least your children are already grown". If it starts with "At least", it's probably minimizing their pain.

Next, communicate how much you love them. Let them know you care about them and that you're in this with them for the long haul. Then let them know the action you're going to take to support them. This will vary depending on the closeness of your relationship. But you might say that you will be praying for them and ask for

specific prayer requests. You can let them know that you're going to bring them dinner next week or come over tomorrow to sit and cry with her/him—whatever is most appropriate for the closeness of your relationship. At some point, you should encourage your friend with the truth of God's Word. Biblical encouragement is so important, but we need to be sensitive about the *timing* of it. Our friend might be ready to hear it right away, or we might need to allow some time and space before they're in a place where they will be receptive to those words.

T4L: How can we be a good friend to someone living with cancer and help them with their physical, emotional, spiritual and other needs they might have?

Marissa: As far as physical and logistical needs, I think the best thing to do is make a really specific offer of help. When I was first diagnosed, I heard so many people say, "Just let me know how I can help." I was thankful that they wanted to help me, but I was so overwhelmed. It was difficult to match my specific needs with general offers of help. It was more helpful when someone made a really specific offer and told me when they could help or a task they could help with—it made it easy for me to take them up on it.

So consider saying, "I'd love to bring you a meal next week. Would Monday or Wednesday work better?" Or, "I have some free time next Friday. I'd love to come take your kids to the park or help you with some housework." Also, if we can offer to help with something on a recurring basis, this will be especially helpful if her/his treatment is lasting for several weeks or months. She/he doesn't just need someone to drive her/his kids to school this Thursday, she/he needs someone to drive her/his kids to school every Thursday. So if we can help on a repeating basis, that will really serve her/him well.

When it comes to emotional and spiritual needs, we need to let our friends know that we are praying for them—and we need to actually pray for them. They will be hearing, "I'm praying for you!" so often that sometimes it doesn't sound genuine. So I recommend our first step be actually praying for our friend. Second, send her/him a text that says, "You don't have to write me back, but I wanted to you to know I was praying for you." And then let her/him know the specific requests you were praying or scripture you prayed for her/him, so she/he knows your words are sincere.

T4L: Great advice! It can also be difficult to navigate the flip-side of illnesses, etc. A friend or family member or someone we may know got news that they now are now cancer free. How can the local church come around cancer survivors and help them learn to face this new reality?

Marissa: It is so important for friends to understand that the challenges do not end when the treatment ends. When you finish treatment and you're cancer-free, everyone celebrates and praises God. And they should—it's great news! But it feels like everyone has celebrated and then moved on, but you're still struggling with the implications of all you've been through.

Everyone thought I was fine, but I wasn't—I was a mess for a really long time as I worked through the physical and emotional damage cancer left behind. I still have things that pop up that are hard for me, eight years later. But especially in the first couple of years, I still struggled around the anniversary of my diagnosis as I remembered those difficult days and how I felt.

Friends need to understand that your friend might be better, but she's (he's) not fine. She/he may still be dealing with physical changes, and she/he will definitely deal with emotional changes. Life is never the same as it was before you heard those words, "You have cancer." Let her/him know you're still there for her/him and you're still willing to listen to her/him.

"Whether you're a best friend or an acquaintance, the Lord is going to use the entire body of Christ to weave together a tapestry of support..."

It's also helpful to find out what her/his follow-up protocol will be with her/his doctors. Some oncologists just say, "Call me if you need something!" Or she/he may have regular tests to check for recurrence. I traveled to Houston every three months for checkups, and those appointments were terrifying. I would shut down emotionally and withdraw from friendships. I also struggled with guilt because I had survived and didn't want to continue to be needy or seem ungrateful. But I needed my friends to understand my struggles. One of my friends even brought me a meal sometimes before those appointments, and it meant so much to me to know that she cared.

T4L: There's a lot we haven't covered in the course of this interview about your excellent book, Marissa. As we wrap up this conversation, can you give us four or five of the biggest takeaways you hope readers will take grasp as they read your book?

Marissa: First of all, everyone has a role to play. Whether you're a best friend or an acquaintance, the Lord is going to use the entire body of Christ to weave together a tapestry of support, and you are one of those threads. Whether you're praying for her/him, bringing her/him a meal, or listening to her/him, everyone has a role to play.

Second, listening is so important, so be patient without rushing in with an-

swers. Next, remember that our friends need to hear encouragement from God's Word, but we need to be careful when we are sharing those verses and which verses we're sharing. For me, the verses that encouraged me the most were those that reminded me of God's presence with me and God's care for me in my suffering.

The last thing that I'd say—and I hope this comes through in the pages of the book—is that I want to constantly point people to Christ as we love our friends through cancer. We aren't going to get this all right. We're going to do or say the wrong thing and make things awkward. We will need to give each other grace and forgiveness. We aren't going to be the perfect friend(s). But our friend does have a perfect Friend—Jesus Christ—who will never disappoint her/him or let her/him down. We need to fix our eyes on Him and point our friends to Him as we walk through suffering. We can trust Him to use our imperfect efforts as part of His perfect plan to care for our friends.

T4L: Wonderful points and insight. Thank you so much for these great answers, Marissa!

***Sola Scriptura* and Biblical Counseling**

By Rick Hanna

There are times in life where what you believe is tested by what you experi-

ence. If you believe the Bible is true, it is not too much later you will come across something or someone who calls that into

question. We are used to people outside the Christian community doubting the Bible, but what about those who profess to be Christian? What about those who we know to be Christian? Their doubts may be more subtle, but that only makes it more dangerous. Their arguments will sound more convincing because they seem close to the truth, but come a little short of the *whole truth*. One area where this shows up is in the area of counseling. There are many believers, strong, faith-filled, Spirit-filled believers who doubt the Bible's effectiveness in the counseling room. There are those who will preach on *Sola Scriptura* on Sunday, but on Tuesday in the



counseling room, they are not even reaching for that Bible on their shelf. In this article, I hope to present a view that argues for the ultimate importance of bringing God's Word to bear on the issues of life and that there is a vast reservoir of answers for us that help in all situations.

Before we dive in too deep, however, there are a couple caveats: first, this article is not saying that there is no knowledge we can gain from sources outside the Bible. Clearly, there are things we have learned through the various fields of study: science, math, literature, etc. We will not throw everything else out in place of the Bible, but we will seek to establish a working relationship with the Bible being first and foremost the final authority for faith and practice for the Christian, and then use extra-biblical knowledge as a guide for additional help.

Second caveat: this article recognizes the overreach of zealous people in all areas of belief, including within the Christian sphere. There are times when people believe something to their own detriment because they are not balanced in their approach. As such, the purpose of this article is to give a brief statement in support of biblical counseling, while recognizing that a balanced approach is needed, as no one is infallible other than God. We must stay humble and teachable, allowing the Spirit of God to teach and instruct us. I do not write as someone who has all the answers, but I write in defense of the One who wrote us a book, the Bible, and certainly the author of that book *does* have all the answers.

From here, I want to give several biblical, theological reasons why the Bible should be used *prominently in biblical counseling*. First, the Bible is God's inspired, breathed-out word. When I was in college, back before the days of cell phones, I was always thrilled to get a letter from Heather, my wife now of many years. We had dated for several years in high school and were moving towards marriage, so those letters were very important and very special to me. The Bible is God's letter to us. It displays His character, demonstrates His love, and defines what it means to follow Him. As such, the Bible should play a prominent role in the life of a believer, and perhaps never more so than in the counseling room.

Another reason why the Bible should be used prominently in counseling is that it is *the only* infallible source of information. As a society, we love to uphold those with degrees as being paragons of wisdom. The more letters that appear after your name, the more credence you will be likely to receive. But, no matter how many degrees you have, you will never have infinite, infallible wisdom. There is only one source that we can go to that is always true, never in error: the Bible. Some will say that the Bible does not give answers for everything, and that is correct. However, the

answers we do find in the Bible are always right and sufficient for life and godliness (2nd Peter 1:3).

A third reason why the Bible should be used prominently in counseling is that the Bible is full of interactions between God and His people. One of the most powerful, impactful tools that is used is the personal story. The Olympics always have a great story to tell about their Olympians. Our politicians give speeches that tell of amazing examples of overcoming adversity. Books are written and movies are produced in such a way as to lead the reader/viewer into the teeth of a conflict only to have it resolved in the end.

We like stories. However, we often miss out on the wonderful reality that the Bible tells a story and the stories are not meant to be primarily a narrative of history. They are meant to be examples to us. They are meant to be teachable moments for God's people. They are meant to instruct us in how to live rightly related to a holy God. To ignore how our story fits with God's story is to miss a powerful opportunity to connect the Bible to life. When we place our story within the story of Scripture, we are given the great privilege of seeing our life through the lens of the infallible word of God. It takes the eyes off our limited scope, pulling the camera back to allow us to see the bigger picture. Scripture is God's gift to us in allowing us to get a better, truer picture of life, rather than our limited and near-sighted view.

A fourth reason why the Bible should be used prominently in counseling is that the Bible reminds us of how great and awesome is our God. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), then it would be wise of us to drink deeply from the well of God's word. To know that God is bigger than we realize will shrink the size of our problems and grow the size of our worship. We will be able to see, right in the midst of the battle, that God is right there with us and for us. The Bible is where we find this amazing God and where our minds should go first when the difficult trials of life come at us.

Lastly, the Bible should be used prominently in counseling because it is *through* the Bible that we learn the gospel. Much has been written in recent days about being gospel-centered, about how the gospel is more than the get out of Hell free card. This has been a great emphasis in the writing community and I have benefited greatly from seeing and reading more about the gospel. But often, even the most gospel-centered people go into the counseling room and look for answers in the wrong places. The gospel reminds us of a number of things that are vital to any be-

liever, but perhaps even more to a believer in the counseling room. The gospel tells us that all have sinned, including us, but God has offered forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The gospel tells us that no matter we have done, there is hope in Christ. We can find forgiveness and healing through applying the truth of the gospel to situations in life. We need to have the Bible front and center in counseling.

To conclude, I will use an illustration from life. This is a composite sketch so does not arise from a particular person, but allows us to interact with how biblical counseling can help. John is a young adult with a clear and solid faith in Jesus. He has evidenced both a love for God and for people that gives clear testimony of his faith. Recently, however, his parents have informed them that they have separated and are proceeding with divorce.

For a time, he thought they were receptive to his suggestion about working out their problems, but once his dad connected with an old girlfriend, he knew his parents would not reconcile. John found comfort, however, in his girlfriend and the growing love they shared, a love that appeared to be leading towards marriage. Filled with nervous excitement, John presented her with a ring asking her to marry him, only to have his offer rejected and the relationship ended. Suddenly, he feels lost and alone. His work begins to suffer and his grades drop. His church attendance becomes sporadic as he struggles to get out of bed and struggles even more to be around people. He goes to the doctor and is diagnosed with depression and is given some medicine to help. The question we must interact with is what is the best way to help John.

Here are three possible approaches: first, we can seek to build John's self-esteem, which certainly has taken a hit through all of the trouble he has experienced. So, we look to surround John with positive messages that remind him of how valuable he is, how much he is loved, how he has great potential in himself, that he needs to believe in himself. Certainly, there can be times when this is helpful to remind John that he is not defined by the damaged relationships. So, we don't want to dismiss this entirely, but it should not be all of what we can offer John.

Second, we can seek the medical diagnosis and treatment. John is showing signs of what the medical community would diagnose as depression. Those signs are real and we should not ignore them. There is much we do not know about how the brain functions and how medicines can help. It is possible that the medicine that can be prescribed will help alleviate the symptoms and allow John to function in a more normal way. Many in biblical counseling have been very averse of using medicine, but we should not eliminate that as a possibility. However, again, it should not be all we can offer John.

Third, we encourage John to consider some biblical truth to apply to his situation. There is clearly grief on many levels for John. He has lost his family foundation with his parents divorcing. He has lost his future hope in the rejection of his proposed engagement. However, the dropoff in work performance is a result of how he is responding to the crises in his life. It is at this point we can help John to see that there are answers in Scripture. We can help John to place his story in the context of the story of the Bible. We can help John to apply the gospel to the relationships in his life and remember that he is loved by God. The self-esteem boosters are no match to the *biblical truth* that God loves John and God is working His plan in John's life. We can help John to walk by faith in a God that leads people through valleys but never leaves them alone on the way.

In summary, we can find that God is still with him and still for him, but we can only find that through keeping the Bible prominent in the counseling room. We don't have to throw away other knowledge or information, but we definitely *should not* expel the Bible from the counseling room. It is God's Word.

A Cold Night in January

By Sarah Jenkins



It was a cold night in the first week of January. Out in the country, so far removed from the majority of civilization, it seemed

unfathomable that so terrible a thing could happen. But it did. The next day, news crews would attempt to stoically report on what would be labeled as a “double-murder suicide”. It was a tragedy that would shock and horrify the entire state of Idaho.

The idea that a peaceful farmer would be repeatedly shot until dead, while he attempted to rescue his sister (and neighbor) from her abusive husband—the man who also turned the gun on his wife, and finally himself—was so unbelievable and

traumatizing that, to this day, some still find it hard to comprehend.

I was 13 years old at the time; the oldest of 4 siblings. I had been left behind to watch over the youngest two at the house. My mother and sister had gone out to the barn to talk to my dad about the disturbing phone call they'd had with his sister's husband, Chris. It was that phone call that led to him leaving the farm behind to check on her. It was that phone call that changed our lives forever. My sister eventually came back to the house to say that our mother still waited at the barn for Dad to return. It was hours later when Mom finally came back to the house, but this time she was followed inside by police officers. It was then that she said words I'll never forget, as tears streamed down her face.

"Your dad's dead."

I couldn't

breathe. I thought for sure she was wrong. Surely, the police had told her a lie or...something. But, unfortu-



Laura Bowler

Laura Rose Cram Bowler, 40, of Melba, was taken from her family on Monday evening, Jan. 6, 1997, by injuries she received from gunshot wounds. Funeral services will be conducted at 11 a.m. Friday, Jan. 10, 1997, at the Melba Church.

with Pastor Jack McWhorter officiating. Burial will follow at the Melba Cemetery. Services are under the direction of Alsip Funeral Chapel, Nampa.

Laura Rose Cram Bowler was born on June 16, 1956, in Melba, to John C. and Leola M. Cram. She grew up in Melba with her 10 brothers and sisters. She graduated from Melba High School in 1974. She married Chris Bowler and they had no children.

Laura was trained as a court recorder and also worked in Boise as a legal secretary. She later returned to Melba and farmed with her dad and brother, Mike. She loved her family and was very devoted to her nieces and nephews. She worked very hard on the farm and loved every minute of it. She enjoyed her friends and always had a smile for all she met.

Laura is survived by 3 sisters, Mary Brown, Martha Burton and Abby Bradshaw; 3 brothers, David, Frank and Alma Cram. Also surviving her are many nieces and nephews and her best friend, Jan Twitchell.

She was preceded in death by her parents, John and Leola Cram; and 3 brothers, Eddie, Bryan and Phillip. Her brother and farming partner, Mike, died along with her.

Laura will be remembered by her family and many friends for her zest of life and her strong work ethic. Her generosity and love for her fellow man touched us all.

McWhorter will officiate. Burial will follow at the Melba Cemetery. Services are under the direction of the Alsip Funeral Chapel, Nampa.

Michael Benjamin Cram was born on March 11, 1955, in Melba, to John C. and Leola M. Cram. He grew up in Melba with his 10 brothers and sisters and graduated from Melba High School in 1973. Mike married Nancy A. Watkins on Feb. 14, 1982. They had 4 children.

Mike was in the Boy Scouts as a boy and earned his life-saving certificate. He later served in the U.S. Navy as an electrician. Mike loved drag racing and built his own race cars. He farmed with his dad on the home dairy farm starting in 1983. Mike was a hard worker and very devoted to his family. He was always thinking of ways to improve the farm operation, and from 1988 to 1991, with his brother, Alma, built the new milking barn. Later, with his close friend, Kim Moon, he built an automated mixer-feeder called the "Cram-It." Mike loved challenges and lately had become involved with computers.

Mike is survived by his wife, Nancy; and children, Sarah, 13, Cybil, 11, Rachael, 5, and his only son, Asa, 3. Survivors also include 3 sisters, Mary Brown, Martha Burton and Abby Bradshaw; 3 brothers, David Cram, Frank Cram and Alma Cram.

He was preceded in death by his parents, John and Leola Cram; 3 brothers, Eddie, Bryan and Phillip. His sister and farming partner, Laura, died along with him.

He will be remembered by his many friends and family for his gentle manner and generous spirit. Mike was ever giving to his family and friends and never expected anything in return. He never tired of offering his help and expertise to any who needed his help.



Michael Cram

Michael Benjamin Cram, 41, of Melba, was taken from his family on Monday evening, Jan. 6, 1997, by injuries he received from a gunshot wound. Funeral Services will be conducted at 11 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 10, 1997, at the Melba Church.

Pastor Jack

nately, it all became apparent that they had not, and she had spoken the truth. She'd seen it firsthand. He was gone, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

After a few more hours, another building crashed down on me as I heard the report that my Aunt Laura had died shortly after arriving at the hospital via Life-Flight helicopter. The bullet wounds she had sustained were too great, too numerous to fight against.

The events of that night will be forever burned into my brain. A sorrow so great that it has been etched onto my very soul. For years afterwards I had nightmares about losing Dad. But just as horrifying were the dreams I had in which Mom announced she had cancer. I remember waking up sobbing from one such dream and going to search for Mom. She was despondent as usual, since my dad's death. But when I told her about the dream, a strange light entered her eyes, and she said, "I wouldn't care if that happened. At least then I'd get to see your dad again."

Her words broke my heart and shook me to my core. I was still only 13 at the time, but I felt certain that something had to change. Something needed to happen to pull her out of the foggy misery that she cocooned herself in. I didn't know what, but that day I began to pray. I knew God existed, but I'd never really considered Him beyond "bed-time prayers". In that moment, however, I reached out to Him in the hope that He could prevent me from losing another parent—I knew I couldn't take it if she died then too.

My mother didn't die from cancer that year. Or even the next year, or the next. It wasn't until I turned 21 that she was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer. She'd been complaining about having the flu and feeling sick a *lot* over the past winter and early spring. By the time she decided to get checked out, it was too late for any real treatment. Her diagnosis came back by mid-April, and 6 weeks later, on June 6th, at 6pm—exactly 6 hours before her 49th birthday—she took her final gasping breath.

A lot of events had happened between my 13th year and my 21st. Most notably was the day when my entire family (siblings, that is) was baptized at Calvary Chapel—one year after I'd stepped up in faith to give my heart to the Lord, while attending my new church (Bowmont Community Church). I'd prayed desperately for the salvation of my family. My mother, who had been raised in a Methodist church growing up, had committed herself afresh to the grace of God shortly after I became a Christian. She began attending Calvary Chapel with the rest of my siblings.

We'd still had a lot of tension between the two of us at this point. Whether it could all be attributed to my head-strong teenager-ness or her antagonistic nature, no one can really say. I think it was probably a bit of both. For months after my dad passed away, she had "checked out". It had become my burden to look after my siblings and make sure she ate food—even if it was just toast for the day. And after so many months of working to make things function independent of her, she finally "woke up" and started parenting again. It caused a lot of friction.

Thankfully, after I'd moved out at 18 and began my adult life, our relationship began to smooth out. And when my 21st year rolled around, we were finally beginning to mend all the broken fences in our relationship. She shared more and more about her walk with Jesus with me, and I reciprocated in kind. By the time she [passed away that June](#), she was at peace with both Jesus and me.

"My suffering, and that of my family, was not in vain."

She'd made arrangements for my siblings to live with a family from her church—one she trusted explicitly, who had fostered many kids before.

That transition was still a bit rocky, but thankfully, God had His hand in it the whole time.

I left Idaho again for a time. My heart and soul were crying every day. I trusted God (and continue to do so), but often wondered why our family had to endure such pain and suffering.

Why did we have to lose not just one, but two parents? Why did my nightmares come true? Why did she die of cancer? She'd fought so hard to keep the farm and our family together after Dad died. Why, after all this time, did we now have to give everything up?

To this day, I still don't know the answers to all of these questions. Certainly, I can see God's hand at work in my life (as well as my siblings' lives). The tapestry of our lives, while knotted and confusing from this side, must surely be brilliant from the side God is looking at. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of that brilliance. Sometimes I see...

Jesus had a plan from the beginning. My suffering, and that of my family, was not in vain. The death of my father led me to seek other friendships. One such friendship led me to a church that taught the truth of the Bible (rather than the false doctrine that had surrounded me growing up in the RLDS church). That biblical teaching led me to true faith in Jesus Christ. That true faith in Jesus led me to witness to my mom and siblings. That witness (and much prayer) led them to saving faith as well and a church family at Calvary Chapel. That church family led to a real family for my youngest siblings after my mother passed away from cancer.

I'm sure the connections are even more substantial. Maybe even unfathomably extending beyond what anyone can see or expect this side of eternity. I suppose I won't know until after I die and find my eternal rest with the Lord.

In the here and now, however, I trust that God's plan is greater than my own. That His will, so much higher than my own understanding, has foreseen all the greatest victories and given Him glory. Isaiah 55:8-9 says: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts... (NKJV)" This passage helps me remember that He is always higher than me—His perspective is perfect.

Even in my darkest hours, I have clung to Him. Even in the midst of soul-crushing grief, I have held on tight. The words of King David often brought me comfort. Particularly the lyrics of Psalm 18 (ESV):

*I love you, O Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.
The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called upon the Lord;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.[...]
He sent from on high, he took me;
he drew me out of many waters.
He rescued me from my strong enemy
and from those who hated me,
for they were too mighty for me.
They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
but the Lord was my support.
He brought me out into a broad place;
he rescued me, because he delighted in me.*

It has taken many years to come to the place where I can talk about any of these things without crying. Even to this day, I still have dreams of losing them all

over again. I still wake myself up from gut-wrenching sobs. Some of these wounds will never heal. Some of these cuts are too deep to truly ever move past. But God, in His infinite wisdom, has given me peace. He has provided me comfort again and again. Through friends and family, He continues to bring me support.

I find that, day by day, my pain and heartache is easier to bear. They say that “time heals all wounds”. And while the sentiment appears true on the outside, I would say it is more “God heals all wounds over time”. In order for us to move on from such hurt, we must open our

“He [Jesus] is the Hope of the World.”

hearts up to our Heavenly Father. If anyone can understand the pain of loss, it’s Him. If anyone knows what it is like to watch a loved one suffer and die, it is our Father in Heaven. He (God the Father) watched His own *Son* be brutally murdered, but for the sake of us (and our eternal salvation), He had to stand back and allow Jesus to die in our place. So great is His love for us that He sent His *only begotten Son* to die for us.

Can you imagine a love like that? Can you fathom knowing that you would have to endure such a thing just for the chance to save murderers and thieves, liars and adulterers, idolaters and coveters—enemies that hate your very existence? It seems nearly impossible to imagine...let alone acknowledge it as historical fact. But that is exactly what it is—a real event that happened.

Jesus died (and rose again) for us. *Jesus* forsook Heaven’s comfort to become a man and die in our place. It was *Jesus* who bore the sins of the entire world—past, present, and future—so that we might have eternal life with Him. It was *Jesus* who became our High Priest, Intercessor, and Advocate before the Father.

If you’ve never placed your faith and trust in Jesus, now is the time. He is the lifter of our heads (Psalm 3:3). He is a shield about [us]. He will give us comfort and peace, love and hope when we put our faith in Him. Psalm 23:4 says, “Even though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Many people will recognize the words to this Psalm because it is often quoted at funerals. Why? Because it demonstrates that God is with us, even in the face of death and darkness. We are never truly alone. Even in our overwhelming grief, when wave after wave of sorrow pours over our heads, we are not alone; we will never be forsaken.

At times He *may* feel far away, but if we cry out to Him,

He will draw near to us. He is never far away in truth. He is our comforter, our deliverer, our fortress, our Strength. He is the Hope of the World. In times of hopelessness and doubt, heartache and pain, worry and fear, we can trust that He will hear us in our time of distress and wrap us in His everlasting arms. Call out to Him and know that He holds you in the midst of your grief. His love is for you. His grace is sufficient. Let your rest be found in the Prince of Peace.

Being the Friend Who Cares for the Lonely and Grieving

By Dave Jenkins



Loneliness and grief are deeply personal subjects that affect everyone. In high school, I remember before my parent's divorce sitting on the upstairs stairs in our house, listen-

ing to my parents' argument, and being deeply affected with grief and sadness by their fighting night after night. It was just so wearisome to hear as a teenager. It also led me into deep despair, discouragement, and depression. As a result, I had to go on lots of anti-depressants and get counseling. It also caused my grades to drop in high school, as I had zero motivation to learn and study. At this time, I felt all alone, like I didn't matter. I was

hurt at a deep heart-level by my parents' behavior.

During this time, I had many people in my life at my local church where I attended who knew what I was going through. They walked with me and showed me what it meant to be a Christian man. Without them, it's not a stretch to say I wouldn't be where I am today.

Perhaps that's you today as you are facing an enormous amount of grief and loneliness. You feel like no one cares and everyone is silent. If that's you, I want to

say, I am *so sorry*, and I can't imagine the pain you are going through. For me, I was able to endure through this season, by the grace of God and with the help of many godly, seasoned saints. In fact, what's interesting is at nearly every critical time of my life, the Lord seems to send godly seasoned saints to help me. In this article, I hope to help you be the kind of friend that cares for the grieving and the lonely in your local church and outside of it.

"We all want to get our say in and tell people what we think about a topic. But we must *slow down*."

Friendship with the Grieving

In John 15:15, Jesus says that He is our friend. We are no longer enemies of God, as Christians, but friends of God. In John 15:1-5, Jesus says He is the Vine and we are the branches. Through Christ alone, we are fully loved and beloved by the Lord God. To be a Christian friend, we must first know who we are in Christ so that we can help other Christians grow in their understanding of who Christ is for them. To that end, let's consider four aspects of Christian friendship: *listening, prayer, discipleship, and counseling*.

Listening

In James 1:19, James tells us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. This is the heart of Christian friendships. We all want to get our say in and tell people what we think about a topic. But we must *slow down*. To be a trustworthy Christian friend we need to take James 1:19 seriously and be slow to speak and quick to listen, especially when others are sharing deep personal pain and heart-ache. During these times, we need to exercise self-control.

For example, a friend of mine named Joe and I are talking and having a conversation about things that are deeply affecting his heart and life. He has just stopped sharing and now it's my turn to respond. How am I going to respond? The best answer at this moment is to say, "I am so sorry to hear you are going through this." The worst thing to say is something like, "Well here's five or ten ways to deal with this situation." In these moments, it's best to empathize with the person and then to *pray*

with them.

It is tough for some people to share with others, especially those who have been deeply hurt. What I didn't share about my own story (above) is that in high school I didn't often have the right words to share how I felt. I knew how to share what was going on, but I didn't know really how I felt, because I felt numb to it all. Now looking back, I have more categories to explain what I was going through. You need to understand that your friend may not have the words, and that is okay. Give them a lot of grace and benefit of the doubt. After they are done talking, pray with them.

Praying for Your Friend

In 1st Thessalonians 5:17 we are commanded to pray at all times. But this doesn't mean literally we are to pray all the time 24/7. It means that we are to have a regular and consistent time of prayer. We should set aside regular times for consistent prayer along with the reading of the Word of God.

Say that your friend is hurting and has come to you to share. You've now listened to him or her, and now you are about to

pray with him/her. So what should you pray for? You should pray for the major things that he/she has shared, but you shouldn't be overwhelming in your prayer for him/her. Maybe try to focus on one major theme you heard him/her say and pray specifically about that for him/her. After you have finished praying and said 'Amen', let him/her know you will continue to pray for him/her.

Please also let him/her know you want to walk alongside him/her through this time, and thank him/her for sharing what's going on.

"At some point in your discussion with your friend, you are going to see areas where he/she needs to grow."

Discipleship

As Christians, we are disciples of the Risen Lord Jesus. To be a disciple means to be a learner of Christ. As Christian friends, we come alongside one another with the Word of God to do life with one another; such as talking with one another, sharing with one another, and enjoying fellowship with one another. Discipleship is not only for the spiritually immature, it is also for the spiritually mature. Every Christian needs to continue to grow in the grace of God.

At some point in your discussion with your friend, you are going to see areas where he/she needs to grow. This is a good time to begin to ask questions of your friend. As Christians, we are all to make, mature, and multiply disciples of the Risen

Christ. After all, we are all at different stages of our lives, but we also have different life experiences. The Lord wants to use those situations in your life to help others grow in the grace of God.

You've been ministering to your friend, and it's going well. Now he/she wants to know how to deal with what he/she is going through. What your friend wants to hear now is how he/she should face what he/she is going through. This is why we start with discipleship. For many people, this is all they need. They need help to learn to deal with their grief and loss. For some people, they will need a trained biblical counselor. This is why you as a disciple of Christ need to be in the Word and prayer each day, so you are equipped for these times of ministry.

As you talk with your friend, please realize that you won't have all the answers, and that's okay. Do your best. Share openly and honestly with your friend from the Word of God. Please try to share with your friend what the Lord has done in your life as you've learned biblical truth.

When you are sharing and engaging in conversation with a hurting friend, try to keep your sentences short. We can all tend to overshare. I've found it helpful to remember people aren't coming to me for a sermon. They want to hear not only hear biblical truth, but to also see how the biblical truth I'm espousing is alive and well in my own life. Please keep that in mind as you engage with your friend, and listen for what is going on in his/her heart.

Counseling

You've listened, prayed, and done one-on-one discipleship with your grieving, hurting friend. Now is the time to hand this person off to a trained biblical counselor or pastor. What you need to understand here is that you aren't a failure. You've walked with your friend as far as you can. You should be happy (and content) that you've done this. And you should also continue walking with him/her as he/she needs you. After all, he/she has opened up and shared with you the deepest parts of his/her heart, and you've sought to minister to him/her in the Word. Now, however, it's time to hand off to someone who has more tools in their toolkit to help your friend. Now would be a good time to let him/her know specifically you are there for him/her and available to have coffee, pray, and listen to him/her as he/she meets with the counselor (or pastor).

Final Thoughts...

Christian friends who listen, pray, and disciple one another are needed greatly. At various times in our lives, we are all going to face seasons of intense grief and illness. By growing in the grace of God today, we can become the kind of friend that is

needed tomorrow. Commit yourself today to opening and reading your Bible. Don't neglect faithfully attending your local church. Instead, commit to your local church and getting to know others there. By doing so, you will learn not only to be a helpful church member, but a Christian friend to others—in particular, to those who are hurting. Please commit today, by the grace of God, that you will be the kind of friend you know you need—one that loves Jesus, is trustworthy, and is ready to walk alongside others. **By doing so, the Lord will use you to not only help those who are hurting, but also to impact others for eternity for the glory of Christ.**

Death: The Last Enemy

By Justin Huffman

Have you ever seen a bulldozer clearing a field for new construction?

The grass, the little saplings, and even the larger trees—all fall equally and inexorably prey to the power of the one who is making the area conform to his vision, to his plan. The feeble plants do not have a



chance; they *must* give way to the might of the one who is moving them. On a much grander scale, Paul invokes the imagery of irresistible power in his description of the reign of Jesus Christ in this world: “He *must* reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1st Corinthians 15:25). And then these indescribably glorious words: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (verse 26).

What? *Even that* great oak will finally fall? Death—that indestructible, unmov-

able bastion against which all humanity has hacked helplessly away throughout our entire history—*death* will finally meet its own doom? The words seem simply too good to be true. Even the death row inmate who receives a last-minute pardon knows it is but a forestalling of the inevitable, an extension of the sentence of death under which every human has labored.

Death is Coming

When Peter was miraculously rescued from his prison cell by the angel of the Lord, it was only a short-lived deliverance; he would later die at the hands of his persecutors for the sake of the same gospel for which he was originally incarcerated. John, history suggests, was thrown into a vat of boiling oil by those who hated his message—without any harm coming to him! Not knowing what else to do with him, they apparently stuck him on the isle of Patmos, from which he wrote the wonderful Book of Revelation that concludes the New Testament. But even John, who probably was the only apostle not to suffer martyrdom, eventually met his own death.

Has history taught us any lesson more clearly or convincingly than that death is inevitable? Even for Methuselah there would finally be a 970th year that he would not see: despite his unique longevity, his remarkable story would still reach its eventual conclusion: “All the days of Methuselah were 969 years, *and he died*” (Genesis 5:27). The only two people in the entire history of mankind that have evaded death—Enoch and Elijah—are perhaps most well known for the very fact that they so unexpectedly escaped death’s inescapable clutches. The recognition of our own frailty is apparently one of the lessons that God would have us draw from our finite experience in this world:

“O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!” (Psalm 39:4-5).

This awareness should lead us to a serious contemplation of the meaning and purpose for our life, as long as we live. *What is the meaning of life? Why are we here on this earth?* Such questions are often asked, but rarely with any real desire to be confronted with the answer. John reveals to us, in the heart-cry of the heavenly throng, why we are here: “*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*” (Revelation 4:11). We are here to please our Creator, to live out His good pleasure each day of our lives. As our Creator, He is always worthy to receive all that we have to give.

But that is not the point that Paul is making to the Corinthian church; surprisingly, he is not describing for them the power of Jesus Christ in order to remind them of their duty. Rather, he is proclaiming the power of Christ for the purpose of announcing their privilege. Christ, Paul declares, is mighty in the destruction, not *only* of *His own* enemies, but of *yours* as well! In fact, Christ was willing to Himself feel death, so that we might be forever delivered from the power that death had over us.

Jesus is Coming

In this life we face many daunting foes: temptation, grief, discouragement, and fear (to name just a few). But none has proven so devastatingly indestructible as death itself. As children of God, we have all known what it is to fight against

“If you are grieving the loss of a loved one right now, death can seem like the final reality.”

sorrow, to war against lust, to battle with depression—and still emerge victorious, through the power of Jesus Christ. But none of us has ever known anyone who has locked horns with that grim enemy Death successfully. The last enemy, the one whom we all quake to face, is the very enemy that we cannot possibly defeat.

But this is the very same foe that Christ has promised to vanquish on our behalf! The last enemy will be His final victory. Here is the unfathomable force of what we read in God’s Word: the eternal Son of God showed mercy to a hell-bound and helpless people by taking their own punishment—including death—on Himself: “*He looked down from his holy height; from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die*” (Psalm 102:19-20).

The everlasting, ever-living Christ entered the realm of death in order to spoil death of all its strength. Death and the devil had no more power over Jesus than a fortress that is being ransacked has over its invaders! Christ bowed His head and entered the doorway of death, not out of defeat, but “that *through death he might destroy* the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). Jesus Christ raided death and brought all of His children out of its dungeons and into the light of His own eternal and glorious Heaven.

If you are grieving the loss of a loved one right now, death can seem like the final reality. But death is temporary; only Jesus is eternal in His very nature. And so all who look to Him, who rely on Him, will live forever with Him.

So Look to Eternity

It is no wonder, then, that Jesus would admonish us “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and

body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). There is an end worse than death, Jesus reminds us: death will be defeated one of these days, but hell is forever. John gives us this graphic description of the end times: *“In those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them”* (Revelation 9:6). What a contrast between this awful scene and the gracious words of Jesus, that “everyone who lives and believes in me *shall never die*. Do you believe this?” (John 11:26).

For each child of God, it will one day become a reality that “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1st Corinthians 15:54), that our Savior Jesus Christ has completely “abolished death” (2nd Timothy 1:10), and that God will wipe away every tear and “death shall be no more” (Revelation 21:4). No more death. Can you believe it? *Do* you believe it? *No more death!* Jesus’ triumph will be so complete that Paul describes His conquest in these comprehensive terms: “The last enemy to be *destroyed* is death.”

With death destroyed, what is left for the child of God, but everlasting life? With the last enemy finally conquered, no further adversary could ever be expected to raise its ugly head against us. For you, Christian, the same inexorable power that is employed in overcoming the enemies of God has been exercised on your behalf, in order to bring death to its own demise! Jesus Christ will one day bury death. And the triumphant monument that He will raise over its grave will be the everlasting host of His redeemed children.

So Paul reminds us, not only that Christ “*must* reign”, but that also, as a result, our own feeble bodies *must* eventually give way to the supernatural strength that will change and glorify them, fitting them for a life of eternal perfection: *“This perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”* (1st Corinthians 15:53). Notice the certainty, coupled with wonder, with which Paul by faith describes this marvelous sight:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1st Corinthians 15:51,52).

Dear child of God, have you been fearful of that fierce antagonist that stalks us all? Have you dreaded the approach of death, allowing its shadow to rob you of the joy of today? Don’t let death steal another day from your life! You see, Christ came not only to deliver us from death itself, but even from the fear of death.

Jesus died, not only to destroy the power of death, but also in order to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:15). He has freed us from that great dread so that we might be enabled to joyfully, faithfully live out the life that He provides for us here and now.

When we contemplate the great mercy of Jesus, that He came and entered death so that the last enemy would finally be destroyed and we would die no more, how can we help but join in Paul’s worshipful praise and proclaim *“thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1st Corinthians 15:57).

How to Deal with Grief

By Christina Fox



Grief is a strange thing. Months, even years after a loss, it can show up unexpectedly. About eight months after my grandfather passed away, I was traveling on the highway and passed the exit I would take to get to his house. I suddenly started crying and couldn't stop. The wave of

grief came out of nowhere; it was jarring, like being sideswiped by a car.

Grief is a wilderness we all travel at multiple times in our lives. Sometimes we grieve the loss of a loved one. Other times, we grieve a broken relationship, a shattered dream, or a ministry failure. Loss takes many shapes, affects us in different ways, and often lingers longer than it seems we can stand it.

The Israelites had a liturgy and structure they followed during times of grief. They wept and wailed. They tore at their clothes. They covered themselves in dust and ashes (Job 1:20; 2:12). They cried out to God in sorrow. They sang out in lament. In our culture, we've forgotten how to grieve. We rush through painful experiences to put them behind us. When others around us grieve, we are uncomfortable with their tears and do whatever we can to distract them. We might even altogether avoid the grief-stricken around us.

But grief is not something to be distracted from, overlooked, ignored, or avoided. There's no timetable and no way to rush through it. Grief is not something that we just have to trudge through or endure until a certain amount of time has passed.

The journey we take through the wilderness of grief is necessary. There are important things that take place there. There are things we learn, experience, and walk through in that wilderness that will change and transform us into the likeness of our Savior. These lessons may be different for each person, depending on God's specific redemptive purposes. We learn at least four important lessons in the wilderness of grief.

First, this world is not our home. Grief cuts into our comfortable everyday life and reminds us that this world is not all that there is (John 14:3). It opens our eyes to things we don't see every day as we go about our daily tasks and routines. Grief opens our eyes to eternity. Despite what our culture says—"We only have one life to live"—there *is* life on the other side of death. Eternity lies ahead for us. Whether we lose a loved one, a relationship, or something else in this life that we hold dear, grief and loss remind us that there is more to come. Grief pierces at that longing deep in our heart for the joy and peace found only in the presence of God (1st Corinthians 13:12). It loosens our grip on this world and turns our heart to the joy that awaits us with Christ in eternity (Hebrews 11:16).

Second, grief teaches us that this world really is fallen. When our daily lives go on in a predictable way, we tend to forget how sinful and broken the world is. When life is comfortable and safe, we tend to forget the effects of the fall. We all too easily live as though this world isn't as bad as it is. But then grief steps in, and we are reminded that Adam

and Eve really did sin and that the curse of death is a harsh reality (Genesis 3:14–19). This means that we are right to grieve the death of loved ones (1st Thessalonians 4:13). We should weep and wail as the Israelites did. We ought to lament, bemoan, and hate the curse that has gripped our world. In fact, such grief should prompt us to pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Third, grief can reveal idols in our heart. When our lives are flipped upside down by loss, we discover just how much we cling to things other than God to meet our needs.

As sinners, we often find our joy, security, peace, comfort, significance, and meaning in other people, in circumstances, and in created things rather than in our Creator (Romans 1:25). When we lose a job, a relationship, a dream, or something else we hold dear, we find out just how much we depend on something other than God to give meaning and purpose to our life. Wandering in the wilderness of grief opens our eyes to see these idols, bringing us to confession and repentance. As we do so, we can replace those idols with a greater love for our Savior, the One who alone is our joy, hope, and peace.

Fourth, grief and loss offer a unique place where we are united with our Savior in His grief and sufferings.

Isaiah tells us that Christ “was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3). Our Savior understands our grief because He lived in this broken world. He knew heartache, sorrow, loss, and grief. Knowing that our Savior understands what we are going through draws us closer to Him (Hebrews 4:15). When we look at the tears our Savior wept in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46), we understand the depths of His love and grace for us.

C.H. Spurgeon once said, “I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.” The wilderness of grief is a stark, lonely place. But it can also be a wave that throws us against our Savior. The lessons we learn there are for our good and God’s glory, as the Spirit works in us, changing and transforming us into the likeness of Christ. Though the wilderness is a dark and scary place, we never journey there alone; Christ is with us. And having gone before us, He knows the way and will guide us through to the wilderness’ end.

The Comforting Truth of God's Sovereignty

By James Williams



Only the bravest people dare to venture outside in the middle of a Texas summer day, the rest of us are either in an air-conditioned building or near water. My kids love to swim, and being inside all

day supplies young children abundant energy that needs to be burned if there's to be any hope of a decent bedtime. So, we spend many hot summer days at the pool.

After one evening of swimming, our kids were getting out of the water and drying off. I took the life vest off my three-year-old son and told him to go get a towel. I continued doing all the many tasks that need to be done in order to get four wet children to the van. As I was drying another child, I happened to see my son getting back in the water. I knew he didn't have his life vest on and couldn't swim without it. In the brief moment between watching him go under and jumping into

the pool after him, I saw him completely submerged in the water unable to come up for air. I could sense his panic, but there was no loud splashing, gasping for air, or any noise we often associate with someone who's drowning. It was silent and had I not seen him go in; I might not have known.

That's a terrifying thought. It reminded me that there are many details of my life that are beyond my control. It's easy to forget, isn't it? It's easy to tell ourselves that we are in the driver seat. Having a sense of control gives me comfort and eliminates fear, but the truth is I can't

"Being reminded of this reality can tempt me to live in fear by avoiding situations in which I feel out of control."

guarantee anything. I do my absolute best to watch my kids at the pool, but the worst can happen quickly. I strive to drive carefully and obey all traffic laws, but that doesn't always prevent accidents. Hard work and loyalty at work go a long way, but some company layoffs can't be prevented. Even with my best efforts, certain outcomes are simply beyond my control. Being reminded of this reality can tempt me to live in fear by avoiding situations in which I feel out of control. However, living in fear is antithetical to a life of faith. So, how can believers face this lack of control without giving in to paralyzing fear?

The Sovereignty of God

While going through this uncertain life, the sovereignty of God is one of the most comforting truths for the believer. When fear and doubt leave my soul cold and shivering, being reminded of God's sovereignty is a steaming cup of soup and a warm blanket.

Scripture teaches us that nothing is outside God's control. Consider these verses:

- **Psalms 115:3** - "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases."
- **Proverbs 16:9** - "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."
- **2nd Chronicles 20:6** - "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you."
- **Jeremiah 32:27** - "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

- **Psalm 24:1-2** - “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.”
- **Psalm 29:10** - “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever.”

To say God is sovereign is to say that no one is more powerful, that He does as He pleases, and none can stay His hand or overrule Him.

Why is This Good News?

Some may wonder why this is such good news. Let me point you to two passages:

- **Job 42:2** - “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”
- **Romans 8:28** - “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

God is in control, and He is working all things for my good. Whatever comes my way, whether success or failure, victory or defeat, celebration or mourning, all have passed through the hands of my Father who loves me. Everything in my life is being used by God to sanctify me and bring me closer to Himself. Here’s the good news, according to Job 42:2, *His plan can’t be thwarted*. There is no power in this universe that can stop God’s working in my life. I love this quote by A.W Pink:

“The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. His government is exercised over inanimate matter, over the brute beasts, over the children of men, over angels good and evil, and over Satan himself. No revolving of a world, no shining of a star, no storm, no movement of a creature, no actions of men, no errands of angels, no deeds of the devil- nothing in all the vast universe can come to pass otherwise than God has eternally purposed. Here is the foundation of faith. Here is the resting place for the intellect. Here is the anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast. It is not blind fate, unbridled evil, man or devil, but the Lord Almighty who is ruling the world, ruling it according to his own good pleasure and for his own eternal glory.”

His Thoughts are Higher Than Ours

The difficulty can be reconciling this doctrine with our lives. How can it be true that God is sovereign and working toward my good when there are terrible things happening in my life? Maybe you’ve lost your job, maybe you’re battling a long-term illness, or maybe you recently buried a loved one. You might ask, “Where is God?”

What's 'good' about this?"

We must understand that God's thoughts are higher than ours. There are circumstances in our lives that we might never understand. Things happen, and we'll never be able to see how God is using them for good. When we think of what is 'good', we often assume that means we won't have trouble, sickness, death, or hardship. However, Scripture tells us we will experience these things until the final consummation, when God finally and fully takes them away. We live in a cursed world and still feel the effects of that curse. But, if we know that God is sovereign, then we have hope that not a moment in our life is wasted. Every circumstance, even the difficult ones, are drawing our hearts closer to Christ and loosening our grip on the things of this world.

We know well the story of Job. He was a righteous man who feared the Lord. God had blessed him with many children and many possessions. However, Satan came to God seeking *permission* to take everything away, and God granted it. In one day, Job lost all his possessions and buried all ten of his children. He tore his robe and shaved his head overwhelmed with the news. Yet, he didn't curse the Lord or shake his fist at him for bringing this about, instead, he worshiped: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Job knew that nothing happens beyond God's control, and even if he didn't understand why God would give at times, and at other times take away, he determined he would trust and worship God anyway.

Final Thoughts...

The sovereignty of God isn't some abstract theological idea that has little meaning in our lives. Rather, it's endless fuel for the worship of God even in the midst of uncertainty and despair. It doesn't make life easy, but it does give hope. Realizing my lack of control doesn't have to paralyze me with fear. Instead, it fixes my eyes on the Almighty Creator. Knowing that a wise and loving God is orchestrating the events in my life brings comfort to my weary soul. When fear of the unknown begins to grip your heart, dwell on the comforting truth of God's sovereignty.

Living with Hurt

By Landon Coleman



From my perspective as a pastor, it seems like churches go through seasons of crises. One year it's marital problems, and it seems like every marriage is falling apart. The next year its illness and death, and it seems like every family is suffering loss. Other times it's just people who are struggling with emotional, spiritual, and relational hurt.

This hurt comes from a number of places. Sometimes it comes directly from our sin. Sin always promises happiness, but *always* leads to pain. Other times it comes indirectly from the consequences of our sin or the effects of another person's sin. Pain can also come from the fact that we live in a fallen world where sometimes things just don't go the way they ought to go. As trivial as it may sound, pain can even come from general disappointment in life when we realize things just didn't go the way we had hoped.

For most people, Christians included, our initial response to these situations is to cry out to God for help and relief. No one enjoys emotional pain, spiritual pain, or relational pain any more than people enjoy physical pain. So when we hurt, we naturally cry out for relief. Unfortunately, that relief doesn't always come. Sometimes our prayers for healing seem to bounce right off the ceiling. What then? How

do you respond when God doesn't take away the hurt? Well...here are five suggestions:

- **Be honest about your hurt, and see your struggle through psalms of lament (Psalm 5, 41, 51, 76).** Many Psalms fall into this category. They include lament for sin, for persecution, for illness, and for spiritual struggle. They can be shocking in honesty but always resolve with a commitment to trust and praise.
- **Remember that your Great High Priest can sympathize with your struggle (Hebrews 2:14-15, 4:14-16).** Jesus knows what it's like to experience family rejection, personal betrayal, humiliating shame, the loss of a friend, spiritual anguish, and even a sense of disappointment. He is not aloof. He willingly chose to enter this mess of a world and to suffer with us.
- **Trust that God is strong when you are weak, and obey God even when it's difficult (2nd Corinthians 12:9, Deuteronomy 3:23-29).** I think about Jesus telling Paul that His grace would be sufficient in Paul's weakness. I think about Moses preparing Joshua to lead even as God assured him that he (Moses) would not enter the Promised Land. These may not be easy things to do, but they are right.
- **Lean into your church family, realizing that God doesn't expect you to 'go it alone' (Galatians 6:2).** Too many people hurt in isolation, but this only intensifies hurt. The God of the Bible is a relational deity. Being made in His image means we are relational creatures. We are called to bear one another's burdens.
- **Remind yourself that you are an exile here, and long for the new creation (Revelation 21-22).** I've often wondered why old people like songs about Heaven. I think it's because a life of pain has taught them that this world is not our home. We ought to long for a new creation that is being prepared even as we hurt. We ought to realize that this place is not our home. We are strangers and aliens.

Putting these suggestions into practice is not a silver bullet or a panacea or a magic formula. But they are biblical approaches to dealing with hurt.

Advice for Those Helping the Hurting

By Dave Furman



The biggest piece of advice I have for caregivers is that it's okay to grieve your loss in someone else's pain. In fact, you *should*

grieve. Your hurting friend or family member is not the only one who has experienced loss. I've lost much of the use of both of my arms, but my wife has lost a husband with healthy arms. I can't help take care of our babies, take out the trash, or put my seatbelt on, much less actually drive the car. That's a real loss for my wife. I encourage her, and others who have hurting spouses or children or friends, to grieve—there's a real loss there.

If you read through the Psalms, they're filled with Psalmists grieving and being honest with God. It's not easy to care for the hurting, because you've lost something in the process. It's not usually something you signed

up for. You didn't ask for a child with a disability or an aging and helpless parent. Friend, grieve. But don't stay there. Grieve, but don't grieve without hope. Don't stay there in despair as if you have no hope. Use this time to grow in your relationship with God. If you're going to have a ministry to the hurting, you've got to walk with God.

If you aren't reading the Scriptures, praying, feeding your soul with rich preaching and fellowship in a healthy church, you won't have anything to give your friends. You'll be like a dry sponge, helpless to offer support to others. So friends, you should grieve honestly and then turn to Jesus for your security, your significance, and your strength.

Seven Practical Things You Can Do for People Who are Grieving

By Nancy Guthrie

Let's talk for a minute about the things someone can do for one who is grieving.

The list below isn't exhaustive—there are only 7 things—but it is meant to give us all a starting point. Hopefully these 7 things will be helpful to you in your relationships, whether you find them useful now or later.



1. Listen more than you talk.

One of the best things you can do is simply listen—without interrupting, without correcting, without fixing, without advice giving, without judging. The truth is, most people process grief through talking. We need to talk about what happened, our fears and frustrations, our memories and our regrets. We need someone who will come alongside us and be comfortable with our confusion and with our need to

simply vent the pain that is inside. Don't begin to think, when you've been willing to listen, that you haven't really done anything. To be a gracious and generous listener is giving a gift grieving people really need that many people are simply ill-equipped to provide.

2. Weep.

I don't know where we get the idea that we need to be strong for someone who is grieving and assume we shouldn't weep in their presence. We can be tempted to think that our tears in some way add to the sorrow someone else is feeling. But, in reality, our tears demonstrate to those who are grieving that they are not alone. For so long during my grief, I felt as if I was carrying huge buckets of sorrow everywhere I went, and whenever I saw tears on someone else's face, it felt like they were picking up one of my buckets and carrying it for me. It never added to my sorrow, it just assured me that other people valued Hope and Gabe and demonstrated that their lives mattered.

We sometimes resist "bringing it up" because the grieving person seems happy in the moment. He (or she) doesn't seem to be thinking about it, and we don't want to "bring him down". But this just isn't the reality. Grief is like a lens or veil through which those going through it see and experience everything. It's like a computer program running in the background at all times. When we speak to a grieving person about the one who died, and he/she begins to weep, it's not that we "made him/her cry". Rather, we've acknowledged what was beneath the surface and given him/her an opportunity to release some of the sadness that was already there.

3. Send a note, and then another.

I have never been much of a note writer. I'm still not that good at it. But on this side of grief, I'm better than I used to be. Before our experience of loss, I never knew that a simple card or note—someone putting pen to paper to enter into sorrow—could mean so much to someone who is hurting. But day by day, David and I would go to the mailbox and find it full of tangible expressions of love.

I'm weeping now as I remember how we would come inside the house, sit on the front stairs, read the letters, and not feel as alone as we did the hardest thing we had ever done—keep on living after our child died. Some people seem to have a gift for writing notes. For others of us, it takes more of an effort, more of a decision to just do it.

4. Mark your calendar.

It is good to send a card immediately upon someone's death. But here's what is even better—to send another note a month later, at the three-month, the six-

month, and the one-year mark. And you probably can't rely on your memory to make that happen. So when you get the email that tells you about someone's loss, take a minute to note those milestones on your calendar so you can drop a note or send an email or text, letting him/her know you remember. Throughout the year, you might keep a list of people who have lost their mother or father so that you can send them a note on their first Mother's Day or Father's Day without that parent.

You might keep a list of people who lose their spouse so that you can send them a note on Valentine's Day or at Christmas to let them know you're remembering how they might feel the void especially on that day. You might keep a list of people who have lost loved ones throughout the year and send a note as New Year's Eve approaches, letting them know that you understand it must be hard to anticipate hearing "Happy New Year!" when thinking about the new year without the person they love makes them so very sad.

It is also good to remember that for most grieving people, it is the days leading up to the birthdate, death-date, or other notable date that are actually harder than the day itself. So it is a sweet thing to let them know you are thinking of them as the day approaches and ask if there is any way you could help to make that day easier.

5. Pay for stuff.

Death is expensive. Even though no amount of money can bring back the deceased or make the hurt go away, providing financial help with the many expenses that surround a death is a significant and meaningful way to bless someone going through the most difficult thing they've ever experienced. They will never forget it. What might you offer to pay for?

- Funeral home services
- Casket
- Grave plot
- Grave stone
- Honorarium to pastor conducting the service
- Honorarium to musicians who help with the service
- Anything that would add to the service. (Recently I helped to arrange for a bagpipe player to play at the graveside service of a young man who went to a college where bagpipes are often played. It was the perfect way for the college to contribute to the service in a way that really blessed not only this young man's fellow students, but also the family and other mourners.)
- Airfare or other expenses for traveling to a loved one's funeral
- Hotel expenses for family members who come in town for the funeral

- Portrait, photographic, or video services for the service
- A new suit or dress for the funeral
- A week or weekend away at the beach or in the mountains
- Babysitting for the children too young to be at the visitation or funeral
- Babysitting for counseling or GriefShare sessions
- Grief counseling

6. Offer to help with the hard stuff.

Everything feels hard in the midst of grief—especially anything that reminds you of the person you’ve lost and the change in your life because of the loss. And pretty much everything reminds you of that.

In the deaths of my children, I have had to do so many hard things that I never imagined I would have to do. Having a friend at my side has always made hard things a little bit easier. Perhaps you need to ask your grieving friend what hard thing they need to do but don’t know how to do, or can’t find the strength to do, and offer to do it for her/him or with her/him. Here are some hard things you might offer to do:

- Pick out and deliver clothes for the deceased to be buried in
- Plan the memorial service
- Clean out the closet and take some things to be donated or distributed
- Pick out and order the casket or gravestone
- Put together a scrapbook, slideshow, or video
- Decorate for Christmas
- Write and address thank-you notes
- Get the deceased’s home or property ready to sell
- Redo the will or adjust financial plans and papers

7. Point them to Christ.

When our friends begin to pour out their confusion in the midst of grief, what comes naturally to many of us is to give them advice. It’s one of the characteristics of friendship; we share with one another ideas and solutions that have helped us with our own problems. We want to save our hurting friends with a solution.

But there is something they need much more than our suggestions and solutions. They need the wisdom and knowledge, the perspective and peace that cannot be found apart from Christ. They need the deep companionship that can be found only in communion with Christ. They need to discover the treasure that has come to them wrapped in a package they never wanted. They need to experience the power

and presence of God like never before, perhaps because they never knew how much they needed it before.

None of us can make life work apart from the grace of Christ. Perhaps the person who is grieving has never been desperate enough to have to learn what it means to abide in Christ, depend upon Christ, and rest in Christ. Don't rob him/her of the opportunity to press into Christ by seeking to fill up every hole and solve every problem yourself. In the loneliness of grief, remind him/her of the friend who is closer than a brother, the Spirit who dwells within him/her, the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the one who brings to mind God's Word which has been planted in his/her heart.

Perhaps you haven't had a friendship up to this point that has included praying together over more than a meal. Now is the time to begin to pray together more personally. Will you get down on your knees together and beg God to do a healing work in your friend's broken heart? Are you the friend who will organize a regular prayer group made up of those who recognize that grief will take some time?

Rather than simply saying, "I will pray for you" in the midst of the conversation, why not take a moment right there in the church hallway, in the middle of the grocery store, or wherever you run into a person who is grieving and say, "Can I pray for you right now?" In this way you can enter into the presence of the One Person who has the power to bring deep healing and profound comfort that no one else can.

Ask God to meet this person in the loneliness of times, to make His presence known and felt. Ask Him to provide clarity for the confusion of grief, patience for the healing process, grace to extend to others who say hurtful things, perspective about what has happened and hopefulness for facing the future. Your willingness to pray in the moment rather than promise to pray in some unknown future time will create a holy moment of genuine caring.

You may have some good advice for coping with all the changes and challenges that come with the death of a loved one, but don't give your advice as though it is the savior your grieving friend needs most. Rather, point him/her to the Savior.

Recommended Reading on Grief, Illness, and Loss

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering loss, grief, illness, and how by growing in our understanding of the grace of God, we can then walk with others who are dealing with these challenging events or seasons. We understand that we haven't covered everything on these topics, but it is our prayer that hopefully, readers of this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine* will grow in their understanding of the these subjects so they can biblically minister more effectively to those who are hurting.

If you've found this subject helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

Grief:

- *What Grieving People Wish You Knew about What Really Helps (and What Really Hurts)* by Nancy Guthrie
- *A Grief Sanctified: Through Sorrow to Eternal Hope* by J.I. Packer
- *Grief: Walking with Jesus* by Bob Kelleman
- *The One Year Book of Hope* by Nancy Guthrie
- *Grieving, Hope and Solace: When A Loved One Dies in Christ* by Albert N. Martin
- *Grieving: Your Path Back to Peace* by James R. White

Loss:

- *God's Healing for Life's Losses: How to Find Hope When You're Hurting* by Bob Kelleman
- *Hearing Jesus Speak Into Your Sorrow* by Nancy Guthrie
- *Love That Will Not Let Me Go: facing Death with Courageous Confidence in God* edited by Nancy Guthrie
- *When Your Family's Lost a Loved One: Finding Hope Together* by Nancy and David Guthrie

Illness:

- *Loving Your Friend Through Cancer: Moving Beyond "I'm Sorry" to Meaning-*

ful Support by Marissa Henley

- *Don't Waste Your Cancer* by John Piper

I hope you gain as much from reading these books as I have. I know you will find them helpful in your further study of these subjects.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

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