

Helping Others Through Their Grief

Text — Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

Supporting Text — Romans 12:15

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”

Introduction: When Someone Else Is Hurting

One of the greatest ministries a Christian can have is helping another person through one of the most difficult seasons of their life.

We all know people who have experienced tremendous loss. Some have lost spouses, children, parents, or close friends. Others have experienced tragic accidents, unexpected diagnoses, broken relationships, or circumstances that have forever changed their lives.

And if we are honest, sometimes we simply do not know what to do. We do not know what to say. We do not know whether to visit. We do not know whether to mention the loss or to avoid the subject altogether. Sometimes, because we do not know what to do, we do nothing.

The Bible does not tell us to have all the answers. It tells us to bear one another’s burdens. Galatians 6:2 does not say we are to remove one another’s burdens. There are burdens we cannot remove. We cannot bring back someone’s loved one, reverse a tragedy, or make every hurt disappear. But we can help them carry what they never expected to have to carry.

I. The Ministry of Presence — Sometimes Silence Is Best

Job 2:11–13 — Job’s three friends heard of his suffering and came to mourn with him and comfort him.

Job 2:13 — “So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”

For seven days and nights they sat without speaking. They did not try to explain the tragedy or tell Job everything would be all right. They were simply there. Later, their assumptions and explanations became a source of trouble, but their initial presence was meaningful.

John 11:33–35 — Jesus saw Mary and the others weeping at Lazarus’s grave. John 11:35: “Jesus wept.” Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus, yet entered into their sorrow.

Romans 12:15 — “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”

1 Corinthians 12:26 — “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

Practical Ways to Be Present

- Sit without feeling obligated to fill the silence.
- Offer a hug or an arm around the shoulder when welcome.
- Listen when they want to talk.
- Let them cry without trying to stop their tears.
- Be comfortable with silence and respect requests for privacy.

People who have survived traumatic situations often remember who showed up, stayed, and sat with them, even when nothing could be said.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*: “The friend who can be silent with us ... is a friend who cares.”

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*: “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.”

Not only must we learn when to be present without speaking, but also when speaking can do more harm than good.

II. The Ministry of Discernment — Know When to Listen and When to Share

James 1:19 — “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

When someone begins sharing grief, we are tempted to immediately tell about a similar loss or accident of our own. Our intentions may be good, but in trying to relate, we can redirect the attention from their grief to our story.

A. Do Not Compare Their Suffering to Yours

Proverbs 18:13 — “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”

Proverbs 14:10 — “The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.”

Two people may both lose a parent and still grieve differently. Their relationships, circumstances, and struggles are not identical. Grief is not a competition, and suffering is not a contest.

- “I know exactly how you feel.”
- “When that happened to me, I ...”
- “At least you had them for as long as you did.”
- “Someone else has it much worse.”

B. Share Your Experience When It Will Help

2 Corinthians 1:3–4 — “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

God can use what once brought us to tears to encourage another person. Ruth and Naomi had both suffered the death of their husbands, yet Ruth did not compare losses; she offered companionship and commitment.

Ruth 1:16 — “...whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge...”

Paul also shared his own severe troubles and God’s deliverance in 2 Corinthians 1:8–11, directing attention to God rather than himself.

C. Be Sensitive to the Timing

Proverbs 25:11 — “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

A word can be true and still be spoken at the wrong time. Ask: Am I sharing this to help them, or to make sure they know what I experienced? The better moment may be weeks or months later.

God did not bring you through your valley so that you could make someone else’s valley about you. He brought you through so that you could help them find their way.

III. The Ministry of Compassionate Conversation — Choose Your Words Carefully

Proverbs 12:25 — “Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.”

“How are you doing?” is not a sinful or inherently wrong question. But after a tragic loss, it may feel impossible to answer, and “I’m fine” may be easier than explaining the pain.

Helpful Questions and Statements

- “How are you holding up today?”
- “What has been the hardest part of this week?”
- “Would you like to talk about it?”
- “Is there anything in particular you would like me to pray about?”
- “Would you rather talk, or would you just like some company?”
- “I’m thinking about you, and I’m praying for you.”
- “I don’t have the words to make this better, but I want you to know that I care.”
- “What is your favorite memory?”

Ephesians 4:29 — Let words minister grace to the hearers. Colossians 4:6 — “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt...”

Different people respond differently; do not make suggested phrases into rigid rules. Be genuine, considerate, and ready to listen.

What to Say / What Not to Say

Instead of “I know exactly how you feel,” say “I cannot fully know what this is like for you, but I care.”

Instead of “At least ...,” acknowledge the loss without trying to minimize it.

The purpose of conversation is not to make ourselves feel better because we said something. It is to help the hurting person feel loved.

IV. The Ministry of Practical Service — Turn Concern into Action

1 John 3:18 — “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

“Let me know if you need anything” is kindly meant, but the grieving person may be too overwhelmed to identify a need or ask for help.

Acts 9:36–39 — Dorcas was “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.” When she died, the widows showed Peter the garments she had made. They were holding evidence of her kindness.

- “I’m bringing supper Thursday. Would that be helpful?”
- “Could I mow your yard this weekend?”
- “I would be glad to take you to your appointment.”
- “Could I pick up your groceries?”
- “Would it help if I watched the children for a few hours?”

Respect the answer if they decline. James 2:15–16 reminds us that kind words without meeting real needs are insufficient.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is mow a yard, wash dishes, or sit with someone while they eat supper.

V. The Ministry of Continued Care — Remember Them After the Tragedy

1 Thessalonians 5:14 — “...comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.”

After a death, friends visit, meals arrive, and family gathers. Eventually the funeral is over, flowers are gone, and routines resume. But the grieving person still lives with the loss. Some of the hardest days come after everyone else has gone home.

2 Samuel 9:1–7 — Years after Jonathan’s death, David remembered his covenant and sought someone from Saul’s house to whom he could show kindness. Though chiefly about covenant kindness, it illustrates that faithful love continues beyond the immediate crisis.

- Call several weeks after the funeral.
- Remember birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays.
- Invite a grieving widow or widower to supper.
- Do not be afraid to mention the loved one’s name.
- Continue praying, and occasionally tell them you are praying.

We often measure grief by how long it has been since the tragedy. The grieving person may measure it by how much life has changed since the tragedy. Never make someone feel they are taking too long to grieve.

The church ought to be known not only for how well we respond to tragedy, but for how faithfully we love people in the months and years that follow.

VI. The Ministry of Scripture — Point Them to the Promises of God

Psalm 119:50 — “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.”

Presence comforts, conversation encourages, and practical service helps. Ultimately, the deepest comfort is in God’s Word. Scripture should not be used to hurry a person through grief or silence questions. Choose a verse that fits their need and share it gently.

1. Psalm 34:18 — When their heart is broken

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Application: A broken heart does not mean God is absent.

2. Psalm 46:1 — When life feels overwhelming

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Application: God is present and is a refuge.

3. Isaiah 41:10 — When they feel alone

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Application: God promises strength and help to His people.

4. Isaiah 43:2 — When the trial seems unbearable

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Application: Spoken to Israel; it illustrates God’s faithfulness in trials.

5. Lamentations 3:22–23 — When tomorrow seems impossible

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Application: New mercies for each day.

6. Matthew 5:4 — When they are mourning

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Application: Jesus acknowledges mourning.

7. Matthew 11:28 — When they are exhausted

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Application: Christ invites the burdened to Himself.

8. John 14:1 — When their heart is troubled

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

Application: Jesus points troubled hearts toward faith.

9. Romans 8:38–39 — When they feel separated from everything

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Application: Nothing separates those in Christ from God's love.

10. 2 Corinthians 12:9 — When they have no strength

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Application: His grace is sufficient in weakness.

11. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14 — When grieving a saved loved one

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

Application: Paul does not forbid sorrow; he gives resurrection hope.

12. Revelation 21:4 — When they need to remember eternity

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Application: Present suffering will not last forever.

Conclusion: Be the Person Who Helps Carry the Burden

Galatians 6:2 — “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

People all around us carry burdens we cannot see. Some smile on Sunday and return to an empty house. Some are facing the first holiday without someone they love. Others still carry grief from events many years ago.

We are not called to have every answer, fix every problem, or explain every tragedy. We are called to love, comfort, and bear one another's burdens.