

Coming along side others when life is hard

Introduction

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We need help/We help others

The Holy Spirit works through us as our 'comforter.' He is our counselor, intercessor, helper, one who encourages and comforts; in the NT it refers exclusively to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ. See John 14:16. *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth."*

What gets you into the room? Answer: A posture of humility and love, Ephesians 4:1-2

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love."

What should I say? Note: Caregiving is not about you. The focus is on the person in need of help.

What not to say (*Side by Side*, p104-105)

- 1) "It could be worse"
- 2) "So, what is God teaching you through this?"
- 3) "God will work this together for His good."
- 4) "If you need me, call me any time."
- 5) "I understand" Note: don't claim to empathize if you have no similar experience.
- 6) As a rule, community group leaders avoid giving advice, but our presence and support is essential.

Key principles in caregiving: listening well

- 1) Scriptural basis for listening well (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19)
- 2) God is personal. There is a responsive engagement we have with one another. God is affected by what affects us. He is affected by our words, our prayers, and our weaknesses. Phil 1:7 *"I have you in my heart."*
- 3) 'Track' or follow their emotions. Emotions are the key to the heart. As you know their desires you know their heart.
- 4) Differentiate between what is a sin issue or what is a suffering issue.
"When someone comes to us seeking perspective, guidance, or hope because their life is hard, either they are facing the consequences of their own sin or they are facing the consequences of living in a broken world. If it were not for sin and suffering, there would be no counseling." BCC Blog.
- 5) Reflective listening
 - a. Listen to understand rather than listening just to respond ('tell me more')
 - b. Restate or reframe ('what I hear you saying is or it sounds like . . .')
 - c. Clarify what you hear ('what do you mean by . . .')
 - d. Definition: Reflective listening is a **special type of listening that involves paying respectful attention to the content and feelings expressed in another persons' communication.**

Reflective listening is hearing and understanding, and then letting the other know that he or she is being heard and understood.

- e. Assures that the other that they are being heard.
- 6) Active listening
 - a. Asking open-ended questions.
 - b. Asking intensive and extensive questions.
 - c. Maintaining eye contact.
 - d. Smiling, nodding, providing visible feedback.
- 7) Listen to build a prayer. Listening with a purpose to care, to let them know you heard them.

Confidentiality

- 1) Always respect the other's privacy
- 2) Confidentiality is 'the roof over the safe house.' Without confidentiality there is no trust. Trust opens the door to their heart issues.
- 3) Confidential information is broken only if they or someone is in physical danger. If someone is in danger, who should you contact/call? Your coach. Your pastor. Or even 911. Be pro-active.
- 4) Be careful with too much of your own self-disclosure or 'matching.' Too much matching is a distraction. Self-disclosure may be helpful but use good judgement.

Relevant Scriptures on Suffering

- 1) The book of Job: conversations on God's purpose in suffering from long ago.
- 2) Psalms: 13; 23; 77; 88; and 102 The psalms give us examples of the language and vocabulary of lament. They normalize the experience of suffering without minimizing it.
- 3) Lamentations, Jeremiah as the 'weeping prophet.'
- 4) 2 Corinthians 1, God as the God of all comfort; 12:1-10, Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' and God's grace.
- 5) Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-9; 6:19-20; 12:1-3. Hebrews stresses the incarnational aspect of caregiving: "With suffering, we are called to be the Body of Christ which reminds our fellow Christian of God's identification with our suffering and His personal words to them, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Heb. 13:5) BCC blog.

Quick Resources

For community group leaders who are coming along side those going through a difficult season of life:
Books: *Dark Clouds/Deep Mercy*, by Mark Vroegop. Crossway publishing.

Side By Side, Ed Welch. Crossway Publishing. Pages 100-130.

Minibooks: <https://www.ccef.org/book-category/minibooks/> (many related topics)

Free audio: <https://ibcd.org/resources/> (covering many topics related to difficult times)

Blog: <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2015/07/23/gospel-driven-counseling-for-suffering/>

"If we have not taken the time to get to know the unique facets and fears of our friend's story, then our "true counsel" most likely will be received as an ill-timed generality that will harden our friend's heart to the Gospel more than it serves as an ambassador cultivating trust for Christ."