



Smiling Depression: How to Be a Good Friend When Life is Not Okay

Text: Job 2:11-13

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Storms will come. We all need friends who motion for us to find our shelter in God. We need *good* friends. So how can we be Christlike, good friends when those we know and love find themselves in the middle of the storm?

1. Describe a time when you were in the middle of the storm and someone was a good friend to you. What did they do that was so meaningful and impactful to you?
2. Read Job 2:11-12. **A good friend knows what's going on.** What are things you need to do to increase your ability to have ears to hear and eyes to see others and their pain?
3. **A good friend takes action.** Read the Study Deeper article below. Which practical action stuck out to you the most and why?
4. Read Job 2:13. **A good friend is slow to speak.** What makes presence and listening so essential and powerful to supporting someone in the middle of the storm?
5. **A good friend has good theology.** After a good start, Job's friends, in the end, prove to be miserable counselors. In short, it is because they acted and spoke as if they knew way more than they actually did. It is perfectly normal to ask "Why?" in the middle of the storm. But as good friends, we need to be honest and say "I don't know." Rather than pretend to know things that we do not know, we should instead focus on what we *do* know. What would be more helpful ways of pointing someone to Christ in the middle of the storm rather than speaking out of ignorance or offering trite "Christianese" sayings?

Challenge: Who around you is going through a storm? What action do you need to take to be a good friend?

Prayer: Pray this prayer out loud together as a group. Every time you get to a _____, insert the name of the person whom the Lord brought to your mind for the challenge.

Father,

Give us open eyes to see the broken and the hurting around us. Specifically, help me a good friend to _____. Give me the courage and the boldness to move towards _____. Help me be quick to hear _____ and slow to speak. Give me open ears to hear _____'s pain and an open heart to weep with those who weep. Help me see the practical needs and step in with exactly what _____ needs right now. Help me sit with _____ in the unknown. And help me speak the right words of grace to _____. We ask all this in Jesus' name, whom you sent to be with us in our pain and to ultimately deliver us. Amen.

STUDY DEEPER

7 Practical Things You Can Do for People Who Are Grieving

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.

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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 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 they begin to weep, it's not that we "made them cry." Rather, we've acknowledged what was beneath the surface and given them 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 so 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 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, deathdate, 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
- A weekend or week-long getaway at a cabin, at the beach, in the mountains
- 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 or with her. 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 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 her of the friend who is closer than a brother, the Spirit who dwells within her, the Paraclete, the comforter, the one who brings to mind God's Word which has been planted in 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 to the Savior.