

MercEmail

A Weekly Devotional by Steve Higginbotham

Ministering to the Grieving

by Steve Higginbotham May 6, 2018

Through the years, I have stood at the head of many caskets, and I have heard many comments made to grieving families that made me cringe. While the intent was not to harm or add pain, in reality that is what they did. Like Job's friends, they would have better served as comforters if they would have just remained silent.

I think most people share a common fear of saying the wrong thing to one who is grieving, or simply not knowing what to say. Because of this fear, we often withdraw from people at a time when they need us the most. The apostle Paul said that since the God of all comfort comforts us in our tribulation, then we should comfort others (1 Corinthians 1:3-4). The following suggestions are offered in hopes of equipping us so that we may effectively minister to those who are grieving.

- Give them your presence. Don't allow a person to suffer alone. Understand that you don't have to say anything. Just be there. A hug; an expression of sorrow; and a reaffirmation of your love for them is all that you need to say. Your presence is what will be remembered and treasured, not your words.
- Don't stress over words. No words can fix the situation, so drop the burden of feeling you must come up with the "perfect thing to say." There is no sage advice to offer at this moment that if they do this or that, it will all be better.
- Be there when the dust settles. We often inundate the grieving family with support during the immediate time of loss, but who is ministering to this family two months later? Determine to be the person who is ministering two months, four months, six months after the funeral.
- Remember dates. Mark your calendar and make note of birthdays, anniversaries, and especially the anniversary date of the person's death. I assure you that the anniversary of a person's death will not be overlooked by loved ones we are left behind. Let the grieving know that we remember too. Such remembrances are treasures by those who are grieving.
- Do good. Don't simply offer to do good, actually do it. Sometimes we find ourselves saying, "If there's anything you need, just let me know." This offer may salve our consciences, but it is rings hollow and is an offer that will rarely be acted upon. Instead, if you really want to offer your help, say something like, "Would you rather me run to the store and get some groceries for you, or would you rather have me do the dishes for you?" This wording is much more likely to receive a positive response and allow you the opportunity to minister.

- Let people grieve. A widow once told me that whenever she started to cry, a close relative would tell her to stop crying and be strong. Don't encourage a person to suppress grief. Crying is not only a human response to grief, but it's healthy.
- Avoid empty platitudes. Trite phrases that do not comfort and some of which do not even accurately reflect biblical truth, need to remain unspoken. Saying things like, "I understand exactly how you feel," or "God must have needed another angel," or "it was God's will," or "at least you're young, you can marry again/have more children" are either hurtful, insensitive, or do not reflect the truth. If you struggle for words to say, then simply say these, "I'm sorry." "I'm praying for you." "I love you."

If we follow these suggestions, we will be better equipped to comfort others the way God comforts us (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

By Steve Higginbotham, 2018. Permission is granted to copy these articles.