



# 10 Practical & Surprising Ways to Help a *Suffering Friend*

*Suffering comes in many forms.*

These suggestions are meant for friends suffering from losses such as the death of a loved one, divorce, serious illness or disease, depression, or job loss. We don't need to fix everything for our friends. Actually, we can't. We can help them, but only the Lord can heal them. And as we walk beside them, here are some things we can do...

# Table of Contents

Show up	3
Call and check in regularly	3
Write a note	4
Offer concrete, personal help	5
Pool funds with others for outside services	6
Offer respite	6
Engage their children regularly	7
Engage even when it's difficult	7
Point them to the Lord, but don't preach	8
Pray for them	9

## ■ *Show up*

This is the second most important thing you can do. Just be there and sit. Listen. *Words are not required; just your presence.*

- Go to their house just to be with them.
- Go with them to a doctor's appointment.
- Visit them in the hospital.
- Sit with them in the waiting room.
- Attend the funeral.

## ■ *Call and check in regularly*

The best times to ask how they are: planned one-on-one conversations, not while passing in the hallway somewhere. Give them time to talk. Keep doing this, for as long as you can, because it's still hard even months later.

- Stop by their office for a few minutes
- Initiate coffee
- Offer to go with them to a social event
- Set up specific, regular times to get together. Perhaps to pray or do a Bible study.
- Connect with them on the weekend. Weekends are often the loneliest days.
- Meet them for lunch or dinner. Or even breakfast.
- Invite their family over for a meal. There is something soothing about a home-cooked meal in someone else's home with their family. It communicates love.

## ■ *Write a note*

Written communication is precious because it can be saved and reread.

**Send a card. Write a few personal words - don't just sign the card. Simple words are fine. Some examples:**

- "We loved her too."
- "I will never forget him."
- "I know this is beyond hard. I'm praying that the Lord will meet you in a tender way."
- "Praying. Praying. Praying. Every day."
- "You mean the world to us. We're so sorry for all you're going through."
- "I hate this for you. I'm crying out to God on your behalf."
- "This is painful for me, and I can't imagine how hard it is for you."
- "I don't know what to say and I desperately wish I could fix this. But I obviously can't. But please know that I love you and I'm going to walk through this with you."
- "I wish I could make things easier for you right now. But I'm praying that the Lord will comfort you with His presence and surround you with His love."

**Write a letter of encouragement. These require more effort, but they are often treasured.**

- Encourage them by detailing how their loved one's life has been a blessing to you.
- Let them know how their own handling of this trial has impacted you.
- Share a memory of their loved one, if possible.
- Write out a few Scriptures that have been helpful to you. But don't neglect to include your own thoughts and words of encouragement as well.

**Snail mail is wonderful, but email works too!**

## ■ Offer concrete, personal help

Specifically offer things that you are able and willing to do. Some of these things may be intrusive to one friend yet an enormous blessing to another. So always ask first, be sensitive to what is helpful to her, and always follow through.

### **Set a specific date to:**

- Bring a meal
- Do laundry
- Do grocery shopping
- Run errands
- Take them to doctor's appointments
- Do yard work or home repairs or car maintenance
- Take children to school or extracurricular activities
- Offer financial counsel or help setting up a budget
- Update a resume or assist with a job search
- Help organize pictures or make a scrapbook
- Troubleshoot and fix computer issues

**Remember them at the holidays, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas. Invite their family over. Offer to help with shopping, decorating, or cooking. Or purchase a pre-made dinner that they can have with their family.**

**Do not say "Call if you need anything." That is too vague and they will no idea when to call you... so they won't.**

## ■ Pool funds with others for outside services

Thinking through what they need and pooling resources with others is a great way to take care of bigger needs than you can meet on your own. Always check first to see what is most helpful.

- Hire a maid to clean their house. Few people are comfortable having friends do that directly.
- Give them gift cards to restaurants that offer take-out delivery.
- Buy meal delivery kit services like Blue Apron, HelloFresh, or Plated. They deliver the recipes and pre-portioned ingredients so they can regularly make home-cooked meals.
- Hire a handyman to come over for a day and fix whatever is broken.
- If finances are an ongoing concern, send gas and grocery gift cards.
- Offer to help with car repair bills if they are necessary.
- Send money - either directly, anonymously, or through the church.

## ■ Offer respite

In addition to ongoing physical needs, they need time and space to be rejuvenated.

- Offer ways to relax and replenish like movie tickets or restaurant gift certificates.
- Babysit their children. For an evening or even a weekend.
- Give them a spa gift certificate and offer to accompany them, maybe with a few friends.
- If you have a vacation home, offer to them for a weekend.
- Plan a night out or a getaway WITH them.
- If their family live far away, consider giving airline vouchers.

## ■ Engage their children regularly

If your friend has children living at home, they are being deeply affected too. Doing something individually with them is usually a huge blessing.

- Take them away for the afternoon and do something special. Maybe to the park, a movie, mini-golfing, a theme park, shopping, a sporting event, a meal, ice cream, the zoo, a museum, hiking, a manicure, paintball, go-karting, or rollerskating.
- Include them in activities with your family and your children.
- Mentor a child who could benefit from ongoing attention. This could have huge impact but make sure you are consistent and keep your commitments.

## ■ Engage even when it's difficult

Talking to someone after they've experienced tremendous loss feels awkward for everyone. We may not know what to say and we're afraid of saying the wrong thing. But say something, because silence communicates indifference.

### DO

- Acknowledge the loss with words. You can say:
  - I'm so sorry. This breaks my heart too.
  - I'm not sure what to say, but please know that I've been praying for you.
  - I can't imagine how hard this is.
- Talk about their loved one. Bring up your own memories of them as well.
- Listen more than you talk. Don't try to fill the silence.

### DON'T

- Ask prying questions.
- Offer unsolicited advice or compare their situation to others.
- Try to hurry their healing along. It takes as long as it takes.



## ■ *Point them to the Lord, but don't preach*

- They need people to recognize their pain, not minimize it. Let them talk and rant if necessary. Let them cry as long as they need to.
- Good theology is wonderful, but not if it's forced on people. Don't try to give them a reason. God's ways are mysterious and we don't know "why".
- Encourage them to attend GriefShare or DivorceCare or another Christian support group that will surround them with others going through similar losses and point them to Christ.
- Encourage them to read the Bible. Read the Psalms - they model how to lament and grieve and yet find hope and joy in the Lord. Read the
- Gospels - they show the love and care of Jesus. Read epistles like 1 Peter - they offer hope in the midst of great trial.
- Offer them a devotional book like:
  - **Ninety Days of God's Goodness\*** by Randy Alcorn
  - **Beside Still Waters** by Charles Spurgeon (edited by Roy H. Clarke)
  - **Streams in the Desert** by Mrs. Charles Cowman
  - **What if Your Blessings Come Through Raindrops** by Laura Story
- Generally, I wouldn't offer a non-devotional book on suffering unless it's asked for. But if they mention it, some that I have found very helpful in the midst of pain are:
  - **Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts** by Jerry Bridges
  - **A Lifetime of Wisdom: Embracing the Way God Heals You** by Joni Eareckson Tada
  - **Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering** by Tim Keller
  - **Hearing Jesus Speak Into Your Sorrow** by Nancy Guthrie
  - **A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss** by Jerry L Sittser
  - **Lament for a Son** by Nicholas Wolterstorff
  - **A Grief Observed** by CS Lewis

# ■ Pray for them

This is the single most important thing you can do. Seriously.

- Offer to go over and pray with them in person. If the situation warrants, organize a group of friends to go over and pray collectively, which can be powerful and encouraging.
- Pray with them on the phone for their needs.
- Set up a prayer chain for them. Assign friends specific days of the week or month to pray.
- Put them on your prayer list and check in regularly for specific requests.
- **Important things to pray for are:**
  - **Spiritual Needs**
    - They would sense God's presence and peace
    - They would walk closely with the Lord and not turn away from Him
    - The Bible would speak to them as they read it
    - Their faith would deepen
    - They would see the Lord's provision even in this trial
  - **Physical Needs**
    - They would have strength for daily tasks
    - Their doctors would have wisdom
    - Their body would be healed
    - They would make wise decisions
    - They would find a fulfilling job
    - They would experience financial wholeness
    - The Lord would provide all their needs and **they would recognize His hand in it**
  - **Emotional Needs**
    - They would have a clear mind
    - They would experience joy in the midst of sorrow
    - Their friends would surround and support them
    - They could forgive those who have wronged them
    - They would have a sense of wholeness and worth
    - They would feel loved and accepted
    - Their depression and discouragement would lift
    - They would have hope
  - **Pray for their family and children - for their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs.**
- Psalms are a great template to guide your prayer. Just insert their name as you pray. There are so many great ones, but a few to get started with are: Psalm 23, 25, and 27.
  - For example:

*"Lord, you are Sarah's shepherd. Help her to see and know that she does not lack anything. Give her rest so she can lie down in green pastures and lead her beside your still waters. Restore and refresh Sarah's soul. We know You lead her in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. Even though she is walking through the darkest valley, help her to see that she does not need to fear evil for You are with her; Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort her..."*

**Remember that the Lord loves your friend more than you do.  
Ask Him to guide you as you minister to their needs.  
He is ever faithful!**

