

Helping Friends Who Receive The Call We All Dread

It's happened to all of us. We get a call or an email letting us know that someone we love has a family member in the hospital in serious condition, and we want to help. Our hearts immediately turn to prayer, but along with that, we long to find tangible ways to help our friends bear their burden (Gal.6:2). Here are some suggestions to get us started.

Be there. Our natural inclination is to be afraid of intruding at a difficult time, but just showing up at the hospital to sit for a few minutes with a friend in the waiting room will remind the family they aren't alone. Don't worry about what to say. Just ask a few questions and let them do the talking. Knowing that there are friends concerned enough to show up and to pray for a loved one (whom they might not even know) gives great comfort.

Be specific. Instead of a well-intentioned comment like "if there's anything I can do. . ." offer a specific service, no matter how small. You might suggest taking their turn in the nursery at church or helping out at home by mowing a lawn, collecting mail, watering plants or babysitting. Or, you might prefer to be a liaison between the family and a group of friends (like a Sunday School class or home group), sending out email updates or making phone calls to pass along information. At the hospital, you might ask if there's a specific time the family would like for you to sit with the patient when they won't be available to do so. If you can't think of a specific way to help, ask your friend about their to-do list and see if you can help with one of those tasks.

Be creative. Think of simple things the family might need. You might provide a small bag with items like a notepad, pens, a crossword puzzle book, a magazine, wet wipes, and mints. Or perhaps you could bring bottled water and healthy snacks (fruit, granola bars) for their vigil in the waiting room. Even the most seasoned believer may have run out of the house without a Bible when they received the call that their loved one was ill. Consider

providing an inexpensive one for the family to use and perhaps leave in the waiting room when the crisis is over. Meals at home are often appreciated. For something different, consider providing a deli tray so that when family members dash home for a quick shower or change of clothes, they can also grab a quick sandwich.

Be comforting. Deep and lasting comfort in trials comes from Scripture, and especially from what is revealed there about the character of God. You'll have favorite verses to share, but you might also consider Hebrews 4:15 (Jesus sympathizes with us), Psalm 56:8 (God is aware of our suffering), Isaiah 41:10 and Psalm 23:4 (we have nothing to fear when God is with us), and Romans 8:35 (suffering does not separate us from the love of God). Try to avoid quoting Scriptures rapid-fire at the family. Instead, let a Scripture verse come up naturally in your conversation or write out two or three applicable verses so the family can review them later.

Be dedicated. While ministering to the family at the onset of a crisis is invaluable, so is continued contact as days and weeks pass by. Even if you didn't get in touch with the family initially, be assured that calling later, sending cards or visiting will be welcome as recovery continues. You may consider sending a card to the patient every week, or emails letting the family know that you are continuing to pray for their loved one. Ask regularly for specific prayer requests, and rejoice with the family when God grants them.

***Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2***