

A SAFE PLACE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HURTING

AT THE RED DOOR COMMUNITY CHURCH

WHAT WE BELIEVE

May the Red Doors of this church and may the lives of the people of this church be a marker of hope and refuge to all broken, lost, hurting, seeking, beautiful people. Broken lives made beautiful. A city made whole. A plague of brokenness destroyed by grace. Jesus.

Why is it that for many who are going through great trials and pain, church is often the hardest place to be? Pain and suffering, grief and loss, tragedy and heartache will touch all of us at some point in our lives and it's in these moments that we should, indeed we need to turn to our church family. Part of God's design for the local church is that it would be a place of deep sharing, not just materially but spiritually and emotionally - sharing our highs and our lows, our successes and failures, our joys and our hurts. Church should be a place where the hurting feel safe and a place where they experience healing from the painful wounds that life can inflict. With that in mind, here are a few thoughts on how we can all help to make Red Door a safe place for people who are hurting.

OVERCOME THE AWKWARDNESS TO ENGAGE

Grief and suffering can be incredibly isolating for the one in pain and often this is made even worse when people don't know what to say so they don't say anything at all. With this in mind, if you notice a hurting person in our midst, these thoughts will be a helpful guide...

- You don't have to say something brilliant, just say something that acknowledges their pain.
- Remove the pressure to think that you need to give them an answer or a solution. This person isn't expecting you to solve their problem.
- The best thing often to say is "I don't know what to say but I am so sorry for what you are having to go through."
- Or if words fail you, just be present. Give them a hug, a squeeze, a smile.
- Important: Don't hi-jack with the conversation by telling them stories of someone you know who's been through something similar unless you absolutely feel it will be an encouragement. Most times this does not help.
- Be sensitive to bombarding them with questions about the details of their situation.

MAKE ROOM FOR TEARS AND SADNESS

Others peoples tears and sadness can often cause us to feel helpless and uncomfortable and we can feel compelled to try and fix them to alleviate the discomfort it causes in us. This isn't helpful for the person who is hurting. Here are some helpful thoughts...

- Hurting people often have a lot of tears that need to come out and they need space and time and a safe place to just be sad.
- Resist the temptation to enforce your grieving and healing timeline on them. Everyone grieves in his or her own way and in their own time.
- Don't rush people through their tears.
- For the hurting person, sometimes they'll want to laugh in the midst of their grief but they're sacred to because they're afraid people will judge them. Be willing to laugh with the person who is hurting and encourage them that it's OK to laugh and experience joy in the midst of grief and pain – it doesn't make them an insensitive or callous person.

GO DEEPER THAN DELIVERANCE PRAYERS

When praying for or with a hurting and sad person we often get stuck just praying prayers for healing and deliverance from the suffering. To do this is to limit our prayers. The scriptures don't promise a 'fix' for every loss and trial. What they do promise is that God will use all pain and suffering for his good. Our prayers cannot then be just for deliverance but that God, through his grace and mercy, would redeem our pain and suffering. We need to approach prayer not as a tool or a way to manipulate God but as a way to draw near to God.

Here's some scriptures we can pray in accordance with...

John 9:3

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him

Pray that God's glory would be put on display through the persons suffering

John 15:1-2

I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, and every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes to make it even more fruitful.

Pray that through the pruning God would make the suffering person fruitful

Romans 8:28-29

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Pray that God would use the difficulty to conform the person to his image

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Pray they would know the comfort of God and they would be equipped through that to comfort others.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Pray that through their suffering they would learn to rely and depend on God.

2 Corinthians 4:10-11

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

Pray that through their suffering the life of Jesus would be made evident.

2 Corinthians 12:7

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Pray that hidden sin might be revealed or that through the suffering the person would be kept from sin.

2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Pray for the person to experience the 'enoughness' of God's grace.

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

Pray for the person to know Jesus more intimately, to experience deep fellowship with him, through their suffering

Hebrews 12:10-11

God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Pray for the person to grow in holiness through their trial that they would experience a growth in righteousness and peace through their pain

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Pray for the person to become spiritually mature through their suffering

1 Peter 1:6-7

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Pray for the person to know and be comforted through the genuineness of their faith that has been revealed through their pain

(Please note, these scriptures are helpful in guiding our prayers but should never be used as platitudes when you're not sure of what else to say. For example, saying to a hurting person, 'Well, God works all things together for good' is often not helpful).

GENTLY ENCOURAGE THE HURTING PERSON WITH TRUTH NOT SENTIMENTALISM OR SPIRITUALISM

In the face of great loss, and often born out of a genuine desire to help, we can often spiritualise or sentimentalise painful situations and say things that are scripturally untrue and therefore ultimately not helpful. For example, telling someone that the person dear to them who has passed away is now an angel, or that God needed them in heaven, or that their presence is still here may seem comforting but according to the Bible isn't true and can serve to hinder the persons relationship with God, not help it. We long for a supernatural experience to assure us but we need to depend on what the scriptures say. Therefore, where possible encourage the person to discover who God really is in the midst of their pain. Understanding his true character will ultimately help them find the true hope that will anchor them in their pain and confusion. We do this by seeking to discover the real God. Often it is only through trials that we come to see God as he really is and discover the God we had been following was one more of our own creation.

This quote by Abraham Kuyper powerfully captures this reality.

- 'At first what our heart feels is that we cannot square this with our God as we imagined Him, as we had dreamed Him to be. The God we had, we lose, and then it costs so much bitter conflict of soul, before refined and purified in our knowledge of God, we grasp another, and now the only true God in the place thereof . . .
- We fancy ourselves the main object at stake; it is our happiness, our honour, our future and God added in. According to our idea we are the center of things, and God is there to make us happy. The Father is for the sake of the child. And God's confessed Almightyness is solely and alone to serve our interest. This is an idea of God which is false through and through, which turns the order around and, taken in its real sense, makes self God, and God our servant . . .
- Cast down by your sorrow and grief, you become suddenly aware that this great God does not measure nor direct the course of things according to your desire; that in His plan there are other motives that operate entirely outside of your preferences. Then you must submit, you must bend . . .
- This is the discovery of God's reality, of His Majesty which utterly overwhelms you, of an Almightyness which absorbs within itself you and everything you call yours. And for the first time you feel what it is to confront the living God. And then begins the new endeavour of the soul, to learn to understand this real God.'

IF YOU'RE NOT SURE, ASK

If you're not sure what to say or what to do when it comes to coming alongside someone in great pain and suffering then ask a member of the Pastoral Team. They will be able to guide you. If God has given you a burden to help carry another's pain and suffering and to be present with them in it then it's important to be obedient to that, but we understand that not all will feel equipped. That's ok. Our culture does not equip us well for these moments so please, contact a member of the Pastoral Team and allow them to help you to help the hurting person God is calling you alongside. It's important that we all grow in our capacity to love and serve one another in this way.

A NOTE TO HURTING PEOPLE

Here are some words of advice very graciously and humbly offered if you are in a situation of great pain and sadness.

- Don't allow your pain to isolate you. Church can be a hard place in times like these but it's important to share your pain with your church family. Don't try to manage on your own. Reach out to a member of the Pastoral Team or to your Connect Group.
- Expect that people will behave badly. People don't know what to say and some will say some stupid things. Others will be afraid of your pain, afraid of saying the wrong thing, or just won't know what to say so they will avoid you. They're not intentionally trying to hurt you. They're just ill equipped. Hopefully what has preceded this section will be of help to people in this category.
- Be careful of your grief becoming your identity. Sometimes we can get to like the attention we receive in difficult circumstances and that can cause us to get stuck in our grief and to sometimes even adopt a victim mentality. This ultimately won't help your healing.
- People will move on quicker than you will. Don't waste emotional energy being bitter and angry at them for this. They simply do not understand. It can be hard but it's important to be honest with those around you with how you are feeling. Often they will assume you are ok unless you tell them.

For further reading:

What Grieving People Wish You Knew About What Really Helps: And How to Avoid Being That Person Who Hurts Instead of Helps by Nancy Guthrie

Holding on to Hope by Nancy Guthrie



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