

The Encourager

Helping People Live Courageously

Vol. 3, No. 1

A Publication of Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope

A Burden Shared is a Burden Diminished

By Dave and Jan Dravecky

*Bear one another's burdens,
and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*

GALATIANS 6:2



Cancer is a life-changing experience. It changes how we view ourselves and our future. It changes our daily routine—perhaps for a few months, perhaps for as long as we live. It may change the kind of work we do or where and how we live. And, as is true for all long-term trials, cancer changes our relationships.

Of all the discomfort, turmoil, and uncertainty that accompany cancer, the struggle to deal with changing relationships often brings us the deepest pain. All too often it seems that just when we need people the most—just when our suffering becomes more than we can bear—people scatter. This is the burden we want to address through this and the next issue of *The Encourager*.

Through our experiences and the suffering we have witnessed in the lives of others, we have learned that we NEED one another. God never intended for us to go it alone. At the very beginning of the human race, God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone . . ." so He made Eve. Thousands of years have passed, but our need for one another hasn't changed. We still need family members and friends to

help us bear life's burdens. Yet bearing one another's burdens isn't easy to do. In the face of cancer, amputation, or the death of a loved one, it can be a real struggle for both the person who is suffering and the friend or family member who comes alongside.

By its nature, suffering brings uncertainty, confusion, and isolation. It is difficult to talk about these things, so many people who suffer feel that they need to bear their burden alone. After all, if they don't understand what is happening, how can anyone else understand? Others who suffer are afraid to ask for help or don't want to be a burden to others, so they push away anyone who comes close to them.

Those who would come alongside and help bear the burden may find themselves facing situations and emotions they have never experienced before. They may have no idea how to relate to a friend who has lost a child. They may not know what to say to someone who has lost a limb or is confined to a wheelchair. They may not have the spiritual or emotional stamina to stay the course and stick with a friend who suffers for many months or even years.

They may, perhaps for the first time, face their own mortality as they watch a friend fight to live. They may feel they have failed if their friend doesn't respond positively to their efforts.

All of these things make it challenging to share and bear our burdens. Despite our best efforts, we will all disappoint one another in our relationships. We won't always be there in the way a friend or loved one needs us; we won't always accept the gift of true friendship, even when we know we need it. But we can forgive one another and keep trying. We can offer encouragement and step in to lighten the load for one another. May God give us the grace to come alongside one another and bear our burdens together. ♦

"Friendship is one of the sweetest joys of life. Many might have failed beneath the bitterness of their trial had they not found a friend."

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

Friendship Means Bearing the Burden of Love

By Heather Grounds

When I went off to college I said good-bye to my old friends, not only because I was going away to school, but because my mother would soon move to a different city. At school I quickly made new friends—lots of them. I had room-mates. I had great friends from the many sports in which I participated. I had close friends with whom I led high school groups. I had deep friendships from the short-term mission trips we took. Plus I enjoyed the many social activities that buffer the demands of college life. But during the summer after my senior year at Baylor University, I unexpectedly had to say good-bye to my friends again.

I had been diagnosed with synovial sarcoma, a fast-growing cancerous tumor, in my right thigh. I had to leave Waco and go to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston for surgery and perhaps a year of chemotherapy. I was not only anxious about what I would have to face medically, I wondered if my friends would be there for me. I had no idea if any of them were capable of supporting me through that crisis. Being a friend in the face of cancer and chemotherapy just isn't one of the things college students talk about.

As it turned out, people from the church I had attended in Waco kept in touch with me. Their ongoing presence was a great help to me, but I rarely heard from my friends. The heart-break I felt from the lack of support of even my closest friends was persistent and devastating.

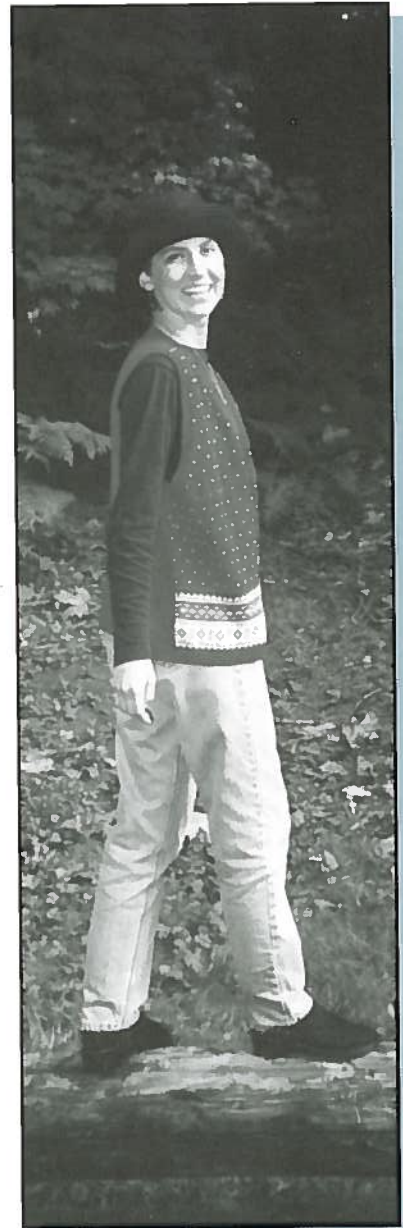
When I finished my first round of treatment and went to my mother's new

home in Colorado Springs to continue chemotherapy, my loneliness and loss was ever present. I had never lived there before and had no friends. I don't think my college friends realized how much I needed them. I just couldn't imagine what was so hard about taking ten minutes to write a short note of encouragement or to give me a call. Finally I concluded that what I needed was not something they could give. What a hard realization that was to come to!

Now, more than a year later, my cancer treatment is over, but the ache in my heart from the loss of my friends still remains. Yet I have found another friend, the most faithful friend of all—Jesus. I have a deeper reliance on God than I ever had before. He has changed my life so completely that I never want it to be what it was before. The outcome of my sorrow and loss has been sweet because through it the Lord showed me His friendship and closeness.

My outlook on how I treat my friends and how I choose close friends has changed. I seek out people who are faithful in little things. A true friend is someone who is not afraid to take the risk of loving, even when it seems difficult or appears that loving may hurt them. A friend is not afraid to feel the pain of others. When we bear the burden for another, we experience a bit of the intimacy that I believe God intends for us to experience here on earth. Jesus went through the ultimate pain and rejection for us. We at least need to try to bear the burdens of others so that we can be witnesses of the depth of God's love. ◆

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Bear the Burden, Lighten the Load

Finding ways to help a friend bear the burden of traumatic injury or serious illness is challenging, but not necessarily difficult. What a hurting friend needs most is your thoughtful heart and faithful commitment. When we're in the midst of our own busy schedules, it is easy to overlook some of the simple, practical ways we can support and encourage a friend who carries the burden of suffering. Consider some of these possibilities:

♥ Write down your friend's medical appointments on your personal planner or calendar. Then call to see how the visit went. Be the friend who shares the anxiety of these visits.

Kim Jones, Monument, CO

♥ Send an anonymous greeting card or postcard every week for a year to a person you know is struggling. On the final card, suggest that the person continue the same anonymous ministry to someone they know.

Scott Richardson, New York, NY

♥ Set up a fax network to keep people informed of your loved one's health status, especially in churches you may have attended. Keep people informed and aware of how to pray most effectively.

Bob Hazen, Omaha, NE

♥ Some time after the crisis is over, send your personal prayer journal to your friend, revealing all the prayers you've prayed for him or her.

Ruth Spaethe, San Clemente, CA

♥ It can be difficult to continually be on the receiving end of encouragement, so send cards, gifts, or money anonymously to spare the recipient the task of writing yet another thank you note.

Anonymous

Comforters

When I was Diagnosed with Cancer:

My first friend came and expressed his shock by saying, "I can't believe that you have cancer. I always thought you were so active and healthy."

He left and I felt alienated and somehow very "different."

My second friend came and brought me information about different treatments being used for cancer. She said

"Whatever you do, don't take chemotherapy. It's a poison!"

She left and I felt scared and confused.

My third friend came and tried to answer my "whys?" with the statement "Perhaps God is disciplining

you for some sin in your life?"

He left and I felt guilty.

My fourth friend came and told me,

"If your faith is just great enough God will heal you."

She left and I felt my faith must be inadequate.

My fifth friend came and told me to remember that

"All things work together for good."

He left and I felt angry.

My sixth friend never came at all.

I felt sad and alone.

My seventh friend came and held my hand and said,

"I care, I'm here, I want to help you through this."

She left and I felt loved!

LINDA MAE RICHARDSON

Contributed courtesy of *Victory in the Valley*. Reprint by permission only.

♥ The extra responsibilities of the Christmas holidays can be an overwhelming burden to individuals and families who are dealing with illness. Offer to wrap your friend's Christmas gifts, or even to shop for gifts if your friend isn't able to. What a relief it can be to know that wrapped gifts will be under the tree!

Jan Hoogenhuis, Pine Island, NY

♥ One of my friends baked chocolate chip cookies for me every week during a period of grief.

Dee Martz, Colorado Springs, CO

♥ Decorate a friend's hospital room with his or her favorite Scripture verses or poems lettered on large pieces of paper or poster board.

Kathy Lance, Colorado Springs, CO

Sharing Our Burdens, God's Rx for Healing

By Dr. John Townsend

*There is a destiny
that makes us
brothers,*

*No one goes his
way alone;*

*All that we send
into the lives of
others,*

*Comes back into
our own.*

EDWIN MARKHAM

Catastrophic illness turns life upside down. It destroys any semblance of control we have over life. To the individuals and their families who are affected by severe illness, life often becomes frightening and confusing.

When we face these situations, God wants us to reach toward Him. As our loving parent, He wants to provide comfort, support, and help for our problems. But many of us overlook one of God's greatest sources of comfort and healing during times of catastrophic hardship: relationships with safe people.

In 1 Peter 4:10 we read that each of us has a special gift that we are to use in expressing God's grace to others. The love, compassion, and understanding of others makes God's care for us more real. The special people in whom we can confide our deepest fears, doubts, and failures, operate in our hearts as "Jesus with skin on."

Modern research echoes what the Bible has said for centuries: people who have intimate connections in which they are vulnerable and honest generally live better, function at higher levels, and heal faster than those who are isolated or distant from others. We all need the fuel of love and relationship to continue growing and healing.

Although we know something of the value of relationships with others, people who undergo severe illness and loss find that, for one reason or another, their human relationships don't go very well. The results can be devastating. So let's look at some of the causes of and solutions to our "people problems."

First, the people with whom you have relationships may be a problem. Some individuals are "fair-weather friends" who are okay during the good times, but disappear during the bad. They aren't bad people; they may just be shallow rooted. Because chronic illness is messy, ugly, and doesn't vanish with a pill and a pep talk, these people just go away. So you may need to find others who want to be with you during your dark days and nights.

Some people fear their own losses and suffering, so they distance themselves from people who are in pain. If they get too close to your hurt, they risk getting in touch with their own pain from which they may have been running for years. They can't risk looking at the log in their own eye, so they focus on the speck in the eye of others (Matthew 7:3-5).

It may be that your situation challenges the theological beliefs of others.

Some people believe that faith in God means we don't have to suffer.

Thus the very existence of a suffering believer is an offense to their entire belief system. Such people can be critical of those who suffer, concluding that they must be lacking in faith or moral purity. Yet in His greatest book on suffering, God says, "for the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; lest he forsake the fear of the almighty" (Job 6:14, *NASB*).

Second, relational breakdowns may be rooted in your own attitudes. Note some of the ways that all of us may keep ourselves from the connections we need:

Self-sufficiency—Ever since Adam and Eve wrested control of their

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lives from God's hands, we humans have tried to live life on our own. Taking pride in keeping our problems to ourselves is not a sign of spiritual maturity; it is nothing short of arrogance (1 Corinthians 12:21). We need to be aware of our tendency to resist sharing our struggles and hurts with others. We need to humble ourselves and admit our needs to God and others.

Inability to trust—Those of us who have had bad experiences with depending on others may have what are called "basic trust issues." This means that our God-given ability to reach out in poverty of spirit and neediness has been bruised or injured and we have withdrawn our needs from others. If this is your situation, others may need to help you relearn how to safely trust good relationships (Hebrews 12:12, 13).

Guilt—Some of us avoid asking for help because we feel we are overburdening others. If we do this, we take too much responsibility for the feelings of others, and our hearts condemn us inappropriately (1 John 3:18-20). If you have this tendency, talk to others about your "burdenness." You may be surprised to discover that they consider bearing your burdens to be a spiritual privilege.

Passivity—We often don't have because we don't ask (James 4:2). People can't read our minds. Friends appreciate specific guidance on how they can meet your needs for companionship, running errands, or sharing feelings. Take the initiative to ask!

Chronic illness and loss can be devastating. God's resources, especially the Body of Christ—God's hands and feet—can help us bear our burdens and help us heal. Ask God for people like Himself to help you. ♦

Dr. John Townsend is a psychologist, author, and co-founder of Cloud-Townsend Communications. He is co-host of the nationally syndicated "New Life Clinic" radio program and author or co-author (with Dr. Henry Cloud) of several best-selling books, including the Gold Medallion winning *Boundaries: Safe People; Hiding from Love*; 12 "Christian" Beliefs that Can Drive You Crazy; and the newly released *The Mom Factor: Dealing with the Mother You Had, Didn't Have, or Still Contend With*. For information regarding products or speaking engagements contact: Cloud-Townsend Communications, Inc., 260 Newport Center Drive, #430, Newport Beach, CA 92660, or 800-676-HOPE.

"Top Ten" Burdensome Bloopers

Words of understanding and comfort are precious to those who suffer. But when we are hurting, we can almost count on someone saying something that is inappropriate or even hurtful. What's worse, we sometimes parrot the same advice when we seek to encourage others!

We mean well, but it is hard to know what to say to those who are suffering. When we're at a loss for words, we sometimes say whatever comes to mind. And the bloopers that come to mind often wound those who are hurting and embarrass the one who has said them.

So take a look at the "Top Ten Burdensome Bloopers" that we have heard and see if you may be offending when you want to comfort. There are, of course, situations and relationships in which these comments are appropriate and will be well received. But these words may not reflect sufficient sensitivity to the person we are seeking to comfort.

1. Let me know if there is anything I can do to help!
(Then please wait around for my answer.)
2. Why didn't you call and tell me what you needed?
(Because I couldn't lift my head off the pillow.)
3. This must be God's will for your life.
(Did He tell you that?)
4. I know what you must be going through.
(You've lost your hair, too?)
5. Remember, time heals all wounds.
(I hope that isn't why time has no end.)
6. So, what are your chances?
(Better than yours for "Encourager of the Year.")
7. Things could be worse.
(Please don't elaborate!)
8. Look on the bright side.
(I would if I knew what it was.)
9. You have the same thing as my aunt, but she died.
(Thank you so much for sharing that.)
10. It's so wonderful that you will see Jesus before the rest of us!
(Don't be so sure.)

The Gift of A Burden Shared

By Dave Dravecky

*Instead of weighing me down with his burdens,
he built me up by sharing them!*

I have a friend, Bob Knepper, with whom I have shared many of my burdens. Bob is one of those guys who finds it easy to encourage others to be open and transparent. He listens while others talk. He is comfortable in the role of bearing the burdens of others, but he has a much harder time sharing his burdens with others. Bob had a list of good reasons for not doing so. Perhaps some of them sound familiar to you:

- ◆ I don't really feel a need to open up.
- ◆ I don't have a close enough friend to lean on, so I must not need that kind of friendship.
- ◆ I can get by without burdening anyone else with my problems.
- ◆ I feel better about myself if I am helping others rather than needing support from them.
- ◆ I need to be strong because my burdens will only make life harder for anyone who listens to me.

Eventually the time came when I knew that Bob was struggling with a major issue in his life. I wanted to know what was happening, but for a long time he chose to be silent. When he eventually opened up and spilled his guts, it had the opposite effect of what he feared. It was awesome! I hadn't sat and listened for so long and kept my mouth shut that much since we began meeting regularly more than a year before. Instead of weighing me down with his burdens, Bob built me up by sharing them! His open heart wasn't a burden; it was an incredible gift! Our relationship took a major step forward in that instant. I thought, *FINALLY! Thank you! Thank you that you have said something about your struggles instead of me always being a burden to you!*

For the first time I realized that maybe, just maybe, this guy really needed me. When he shared his deepest thoughts with me and poured out his heart to me, he told me that he valued me enough to entrust me with something of great value; his whole person, not just the cover of strength.

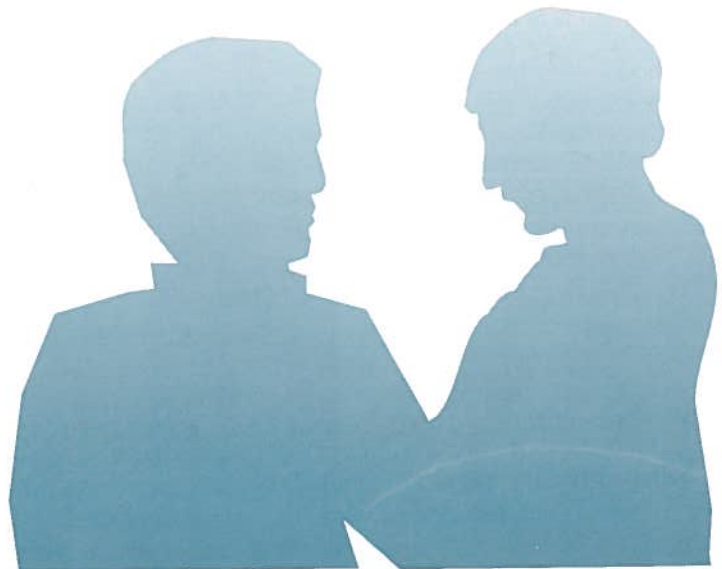
We need to give more than lip service to the idea of sharing our burdens with one

another. We truly do *need* one another, especially when we are suffering. One way we affirm the value of our friends is to take turns bearing each other's burdens. ◆

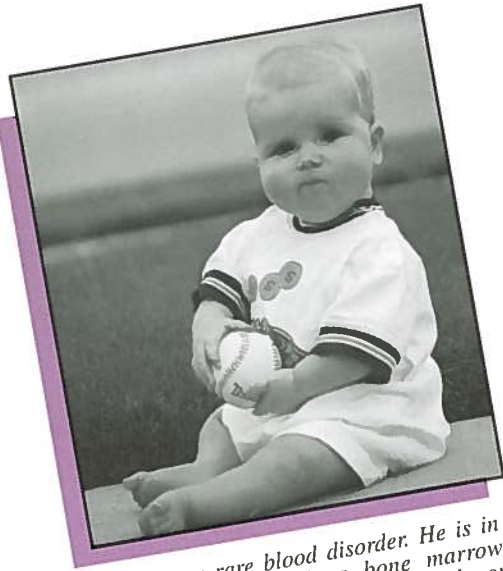
Adapted from *The Worth of a Man* by Dave Dravecky with C. W. Neal. Published by Zondervan Publishing House. To order an autographed copy, refer to the order envelope inside this issue.

*Two are better than one,
because they have a good return
for their work;
If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!*

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10 (NIV)



RETURNED TO SENDER!



Will has a rare blood disorder. He is in remission but needs a bone marrow donor. Call (800) 627-7692 for donor testing information.

Our daughter passed away last year after a 13-month battle with leukemia. She began chemo when she was 17 days old. What a struggle to watch (and I used to think watching immunizations was bad!). She fought the fight and won a place in heaven. Many lives were touched by her, but sometimes that's hard to remember. It seems everyone forgets and doesn't realize that it still hurts. My mother-in-law lost the battle to lung cancer 16 days later. New wounds don't heal well when ripped open again. But whenever I feel everyone has forgotten, I get a note, book, or phone call from your organization, and in some way that helps.

Pam Dykehouse
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Thank you so much for the note and the book. It was a bright gift on a sad day. Friends and family forget, but I'm so glad you didn't.

Bob & Janet Spellman
Springfield, Missouri

Letters are a precious gift—to give and to receive. Many such gifts are mailed each week at Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope, and we receive several in return that contain beautiful expressions of love and appreciation. The encouragement others share with us we share with you, because your prayers and support make the delivery of this mail possible . . . both ways. Thank you for encouraging us!

Dear Dave Dravecky,
Thank you for the book of your baseball story, the lullaby tape, and the T-shirt. What an awesome birthday gift! I especially like the book because of your autograph. I will display it along with my Micky Mantle baseball, although you are much more of a hero than he ever was. My Mommy can't wait to read your book to me. I'll never get tired of hearing how God has worked in your life. The lullaby tape will get lots of playing time too, especially when I go back into the hospital. I'll wear the T-shirt proudly to let everyone know of God's greatness. I love you,
Will Espy
Arlington, Texas

Thank you so much for sending us a copy of *The Worth of a Man*. What a nice surprise to find in the mail. You have no idea what your encouragement means to Troy and me. The most recent issue of *The Encourager* hit right where I am—struggling to find joy in this situation. I especially identified with Jan where she described not being able to feel God's presence or remember what it felt like to believe in Him. Never in my life has my faith been so shaken or have I felt so spiritually dry. What a relief to know that I'm not alone in those feelings and that others have walked this path before me and have found joy on the other side.

Kim Bol
Chetek, Wisconsin

We're Recruiting!

If you have a story of courage to share, you may be just the teammate we need!

Every day, lives are deeply touched by ordinary, unsung heroes who have found either the strength to live, the strength to suffer, or the strength to die. Our desire is to collect the stories of these heroes in a book that will encourage others. You may be or know one of those unsung heroes. Will you step up to the plate and share your story with us? No writing experience is necessary—just a heart that is willing to share.

To be considered for this project, your story should be about 750-1,500 words long. Please type it and send it to the Outreach of Hope along with your name, address, and phone number. We look forward to reading your story of courage.

*Therefore encourage one another
and build each other up,
just as in fact you are doing.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11 (NIV)

The Encourager is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you've read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don't throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

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Our Mission

Offering comfort, hope, and encouragement through Jesus Christ to those who suffer from cancer or amputation. We accomplish this mission by offering prayer support, personal contact, correspondence, resource referral, and the gift of encouraging literature.



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Coming Next Issue: More on how you can help bear the burden for a hurting friend.

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