

The Encourager

Helping People Live Courageously

Vol. 3, No. 2 Spring 1997

A Publication of Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope

*Let us not love with words or tongue
but with actions and in truth.*

1 JOHN 3:18 (NIV)

In the last issue of *The Encourager*, we shared about the importance of bearing one another's burdens. We uncovered some of the pain that those who suffer must bear and showed how much more difficult—if not impossible—it is to bear that burden alone. In this issue, we want to further explore what it means to bear one another's burdens. We want to point those who would be encouragers in the right direction so that they can be the blessing God intends them to be in the lives of those who suffer.

We know that comforting those who hurt is difficult and unfamiliar territory. It isn't easy to step in and help carry the load for a hurting friend. The pitfalls and unexpected turns that line the path of encouragement are unsettling—even frightening. We don't know what to do or when. We're afraid of doing or saying the "wrong" thing. We don't know where to turn for help. This uncertainty causes many would-be encouragers to feel inadequate and to turn back.

Although Jan and I and the Outreach of Hope staff encourage others on a daily basis, we haven't always known how to do this. There was a time before cancer, before depression, when Jan and I didn't have a clue. And there are times now when we still don't know what to do. One time I knew I needed to call a woman whose cancer was terminal, and, even though I have

had cancer, I didn't know what to say to her. My cancer wasn't terminal and I kept thinking, *What do I say to someone who is dying?* I was so troubled by my inadequacy that I put off calling her for weeks. When I finally mustered the courage to call her, she had died. In my eyes, I had blown it.

Many others who have tried to share the burdens of those who suffer know how painfully inadequate we are to fully meet their needs. Several years ago our ministry coordinator, Kim Jones, who is experienced in health-care and ministry, was called upon to walk with her friend through a year-long battle with terminal cancer. "My best friend learned how real and loving God could be in the midst of her pain," Kim explains, "and I learned how inadequate and ill-prepared I was to walk with her through it. School had taught me to use my head, everyday life taught me to use my hands, but nothing had taught

my heart how to bear this burden." Yet God was faithful, and Kim discovered the truth of the saying, "God's hand will never lead you where His grace cannot keep you."

Despite our inadequacy, God intends for us to walk with those who suffer and to share His love by bearing one another's burdens. This is something we each must learn how to do. Our desire is to take those who would be encouragers a little further down the pathway of encouragement. We want to point you in a direction that will help you bear some of the pain that weighs heavily on your friend or loved one. We want to help you discover the actions of love that will encourage and comfort someone who is suffering. ♦

Walking the Path of Encouragement

Bearing the Burden for a Hurting Friend . . . Signposts that Point the Way

by Dave Dravecky





Honor the Pain

by Kim Jones

It is no accident that the book of Job—a story of suffering—was one of the first books of the Bible to be written. In one awful day, Job lost his livestock, his servants, his children, and not long afterward, he lost his health. When his friends came to see him, they honored his overwhelming pain by sitting on the ground with him and weeping “for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great” (Job 2:13).

Although Job’s friends later said things that added greatly to his pain, they at least started out on the right track. Like Job’s friends, many of us desire to help our suffering friends, but we don’t know what to do with their pain. It makes us feel uncomfortable. It is something we instinctively want to avoid. It reminds us that we are not in control, that we are human. Yet there is no shortcut or escape from pain, and, like an infectious boil, pain can only increase when it is left alone.

We honor a friend’s pain first by accepting that it is real, not imaginary. By confirming the reality of our friend’s pain, we give our friend permission to deal with it. We can then continue to honor our friend’s pain by being there, by listening, by crying, and by facing it side by side

with our friend. Our willingness to be present in the midst of pain is an encouraging relief, no matter how horrible the pain may be. When my friend learned of her terminal diagnosis, for instance, we cried for hours. There were no fitting words to be spoken, only pain to be felt and expressed.

On many occasions, I watched as my friend tried to share her pain with others. Most of the time, the listener would change the subject or attempt to offer a philosophical explanation for her situation. Whenever this happened, my friend would retreat, forced to face her feelings without the support of that person. The would-be listener lost out on the incredible privilege of helping to bear her burden.

My friend’s experience is not unique. A woman who lost her husband to cancer explains the situation well: “I’m careful about who I share my feelings with. Everyone wants to ‘fix’ me and make my problems go away, but they can’t ‘fix’ this. I just need them to listen, to honor my pain.” So if you have a friend who is enduring the pain of cancer, or a friend who is a loved one of a cancer patient, sit with that friend for a while. Listen, honor the pain, and help your friend carry it. Don’t be concerned about what to say; your silence will speak volumes. ◆

Rejoice with
those who rejoice;
mourn with those
who mourn.

ROMANS 12:15 (NIV)

Key to Walking the Path of Encouragement

Words that Honor Pain

- I love you.
- I cannot begin to understand the pain you are feeling, but I’m here to be with you.
- I know I can’t make your pain go away, but I want to help.
- Would you like to talk?
- Can I give you a hug?
- Tell me how you really feel. I want to know.
- Do you want to be alone, or would you like a friend nearby?
- I can see that you are hurting, do you want someone to cry with?

A friend is one
who joyfully sings with you
when you are on the mountain top,
and silently walks beside you
through the valley.

WILLIAM A. WARD



Be Honest, Accept Honesty

Points of Interest

The Faces of Pain

► **Physical pain**—Cancer patients often endure tremendous physical pain as a result of their illness. In addition, they often must live in the battleground of surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy with the accompanying stitches, sunburns, and sick stomachs.

► **Emotional pain**—The cancer patient and family also face the pain of adjusting to major life changes. Their daily routine is often turned upside down. Family relationships change. In the all-consuming battle against the cancer, emotional needs often go unmet. Emotional neglect can be managed for a time, but cancer is rarely short term.

► **Spiritual pain**—Sometimes, when the quiet moments come, the noise of nagging questions roars in: Why? Why me? Why now? Only rarely do the heavens open up with answers. While bodies wrestle with physical pain and hearts face emotional pain, the deafening silence of unanswered questions can bring spiritual pain—the most disturbing pain of all.

If we're to help bear the burden for a suffering friend, honesty about failures, shortcomings, and expectations is essential. We feel uncomfortable when we don't have the answers to life's difficult problems. We want to hide when we feel we have failed. We tend to bury painful disappointments. These natural responses (from the one who is suffering as well as from those who would be encouragers) can break down close relationships at the very time we need them the most.

As encouragers, we need to be honest about our fears, our weaknesses, our strengths. If we haven't "been there" for a hurting friend, we need to let our friend know why—not as an excuse, but as an apology. We need to resolve the past losses and hurts so that we can encourage our friend in whatever way is possible today and tomorrow.

We need to be honest about the kind of encouragement and support we are able to offer. If you are a terrific problem solver but struggle as a listener, let your friend know how you want to employ your problem-solving gift for his or her benefit. Perhaps you can be a meal or transportation coordinator, or the person who will make sure that the yard maintenance is done.

We need to allow our hurting friend to be honest, too.

We need to drop our agendas for those who hurt. We need to be there *for* them, not to *form* them.

Allowing a hurting friend to be completely honest is not easy, particularly if our friend is angry. Anger is one of the more difficult—but totally normal—emotions a person encounters when dealing with a life-threatening illness. And a hurting friend's anger can be intimidating and shocking.

In the heat of anger, your friend may make unsettling pronouncements about life or God or rapidly fire questions at you, demanding answers. If so, count it a privilege that your friend has trusted you enough to expose his or her deepest pain to you. In the face of such honesty, Dave Biebel, author of *How to Help a Heartbroken Friend*, says we are "as close to representing God as is humanly possible." So your response is extremely important. Don't fall into the trap of giving pat answers or attempting to explain away your friend's suffering. Simply accept your friend's honesty and respond in honesty. It is okay not to have answers.

Honesty opens the floodgates to a hurting heart. Honesty allows tears and silence. It allows joy and fear. It allows questions—with or without answers.

Honesty gives a hurting heart a safe place to be loved, to grow, and to heal. ◆

A friend
is a person with
whom I may be
sincere, before
whom I may think
out loud.

RALPH WALDO
EMERSON



Give Up Your Self

*My command is this:
Love each other as I have loved you.
Greater love has no one than this,
that he lay down his life
for his friends.*

JOHN 15:12-13 (NIV)

T rue friends give of themselves for one another. Giving up one's self is essential when we seek to encourage a friend who is suffering from cancer or other long-term physical condition. It may mean setting aside my agenda and taking on my friend's agenda. It may mean laying down my free time and giving it to my friend. It may mean laying down my opinion on a matter and allowing my friend's opinion to take center stage.

It isn't easy to give up one's self. We are inherently selfish. No matter how much we desire to encourage others, no matter how disciplined we are, no matter how spiritually motivated we are, our instincts cry out loudly, "Me first!" At some point, our friend's needs and our self-centered desires will collide. At some point we will find ourselves wishing we could watch the movie we wanted to see rather than listening to our friend. At some point we will grow weary of bearing our friend's burden and think, What about my needs?

So be warned. Helping to bear a friend's burden will cause personal discomfort. We may be called upon to carry a load that is far heavier than we first imagined, or we may need to carry it for a greater distance than we would prefer. It is important to decide early on if we are up to that challenge, if we will bear with the inconvenience for the long haul. If not, we need to be honest with ourselves and our friend regarding our commit-

ment. Backing away from a suffering friend when the going gets tough can be as painful as the worst medical treatment they will endure.

Those who would encourage a suffering friend walk a tightrope between giving of themselves and maintaining their personal health. Yes, we are to bear one another's burdens, but we're not supposed to carry the whole load. To do so is harmful—to us and to those we seek to encourage. Carrying the whole load for a friend is harmful because it may prolong his or her denial and pain. If we do for our friend what our friend is capable of doing, we may undermine his or her sense of personal worth and hinder his or her continued emotional and spiritual growth.

So it is important for those who would be encouragers to examine both motives and actions. Ask God to help you become aware of your selfish tendencies so that you can truly give of yourself. Ask God to unveil your true motives, so that you can give purely, not for the purpose of building up yourself. Ask God to show you what not to do so that you can set healthy boundaries and avoid a codependent relationship, which is wearying to you and demeaning to your friend. Ask God to help you develop an "energizer bunny" faithfulness—one that keeps giving and giving and giving in a way that draws both you and your friend closer to God and makes you more aware of His loving presence in your lives. ◆

Key to Walking the Path of Encouragement

Sometimes those who suffer can't even think of what another person could do to help. The following questions might enable your friend to express his or her needs.

- When may I take your children on an outing (to the park, fishing, ball game, camping, out for pizza or ice cream—you fill in the blank)?
- What errands may I run for you?
- What undone chores around the house are weighing on you?
- What is your favorite meal, and when can I fix it for you?
- What can I do that would bless your heart today?





Points of Interest

Practical Ways to Bear the Burden, Lighten the Load

► The act of kindness that ministers to me the most is when someone prepares a meal for me. I know the love and the sacrifice of time that goes into preparing it.

Judy Lattman

► It meant so much for friends to come and sit with us or listen to us if we needed to talk or cry. To know that someone had cleared a busy schedule to come to our side, to be with us was the most tangible display of “denying self” that we witnessed.

Candy Cooper

► One of our friends was scared to death of flying, but she stepped way out of her “comfort zone” and got on an airplane with her husband just to be with me during one of my surgeries. That is a gift of one’s self.

Dave and Jan Dravecky

► Give your friend a haircut, manicure, facial, or new hairstyle. A fresh look, and knowing that someone still cares to help him or her look good can be an encouragement. Of course, if these things aren’t your personal forte, hire someone else to do the job!

Amanda Sorenson

► For three months we were at the hospital for thirteen to fourteen hours a day. Neighbors took turns and walked our little dog who was home alone.

Sara Hines



Listen with All Your Heart

I was sitting, torn by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God’s dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly. He said things I knew were true.

I was unmoved, except to wish he’d go away. He finally did.

Another came and sat beside me. He didn’t talk. He didn’t ask me leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left.

I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.

JOE BAYLY, THE VIEW FROM A HEARSE

When people suffer, they may feel emotions they never felt before. They may ask questions they had never thought to ask. They may say things they never dared to say before. They may repeat the same stories or ask the same questions over and over again. Through it all, they need someone who loves them enough to listen.

In order to know how you can encourage your friend’s heart, you will need to become a perceptive listener. Listen for key words, a different tone of voice, or a change in emphasis that reveals whether your friend is currently on level ground, on an uphill climb, or headed for a downhill slide. Listen carefully to know whether you should ask

questions that will lead your friend to share deeper emotions, or whether it is best to tune your heart to hear every nuance of your friend’s silence.

If you tend to take the lead in conversations, learn to set aside your “itinerary.” You may assume your friend wants to talk about an upcoming treatment or recent test result. Your friend, on the other hand, may want to set aside the “heavy” stuff and talk about the latest movie or laugh about a shared memory. Allow your friend to lead your ears and heart into the territory he or she has chosen. You may be in for a surprising journey! ♦

Key to Walking the Path of Encouragement

Statements and questions that a good listener will sometimes use to help a hurting friend express deep, inner feelings:

- Is anything troubling you right now? Would you like to talk about it?
- I promise not to interrupt.
- We have talked about everyone else. Now tell me, how are you doing?
- Tell me your story.
- What are you doing for yourself?
- You have my undivided attention.
- That seems difficult for you. Would you like to talk about it more?
- Please tell me what you want me to know about you today.



Negotiating the Path of Forgiveness

Love does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:5 (NIV)

The stress and strain of serious illness brings everyone’s weaknesses to the surface—those of the patient, as well as those of caregivers and encouragers. Fear, pain, fatigue, depression, job changes, income loss, isolation, uncertainty, and other stresses can so drain a person’s energy that social norms and niceties fly right out the window. Phone calls may not be returned. Thank-yous, or even an acknowledgment of meals or flowers may not be given. Feelings are easily hurt by the lack of what we consider to be an appropriate response. And the feelings of patients are hurt when their friends are not able to support them in the way they desire and need.

So forgiveness is absolutely necessary. Forgiveness is the godly response to the human condition. It is not a feeling or emotion. It is more like a comforting blanket that covers one’s frailty and weakness with unconditional love. Forgiveness is the gift that enables a friendship to survive the ups and downs of serious illness.

Heather Grounds, the college student who shared her story in the last issue of *The Encourager*, now shares her story of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The loss of some friendships during my treatment for cancer was devastating to me. I struggled to know what to do. *Is it really necessary to let my friends know how painful it was to not have their friendship?* I wondered. *What if I try to reestablish the relationship and they don’t even respond?* During this time, 2 Corinthians 5:16-18 kept coming back to me: “So from now on we regard no one

from a worldly point of view . . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:16-18 NIV). So I decided to obey God’s Word and seek reconciliation.

For several months I prayed for an attitude of love toward my friends who had hurt me. I prayed for a heart to forgive them, no matter what the pain. This wasn’t easy because their lack of friendship was ongoing, and it continued to eat away at me. Eventually I realized that although I could not control their actions, I could control mine. That refreshing revelation set me free to take action.

You see, we naturally assume that our friends should do certain things that are required in a friendship—like be there for us when we are really sick. I struggled to understand why my friends didn’t reach out to me or in some tangible way let me know they cared. Because they had not done for me what I thought they should have done, I had become bitter and angry in my heart toward them. I knew this was wrong. God has commanded us to allow no root of bitterness to grow in our hearts, so I knew I was in trouble. My heart was not right before God because of my bitterness. Although I couldn’t control my friends’ actions, my attitude toward them was up to me and God. I needed to give my bitterness

over to God and do my part to initiate forgiveness and reconciliation with my friends.

So I took the step to reestablish communication with one friend by lovingly sharing my hurts with her. I knew I was risking another loss if she didn’t respond, but I never really thought I wouldn’t hear from her again for months! This was a terrible blow because I thought I had done what was right. Yet her response made me feel like I had messed up.

When we saw each other again, however, my friend shared her side of the story. As it turned out, she had been going through difficult times that I didn’t know about, and my situation was more than she could handle—it immobilized her. She had felt guilty because she couldn’t give more to me at the time, and I hadn’t validated what she was able to give. After that meeting, I was so thankful to have heard of her struggle. I thought that this would be the beginning of a new relationship.

But three months passed without a word from her. I was so confused. I thought we had really accomplished something—then nothing. When I had the opportunity to see her again, it was difficult. I simply chose to love her and didn’t probe to find out why she hadn’t written. I had to lay myself down and allow her to respond in her own way without fear of what I might think or do.

My friend is not perfect—no more than I am—and so we suit each other admirably.
ALEXANDER SMITH



Blessed be the Lord who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation.

PSALM 68:19 (NASB)

The most amazing thing happened about a month later—I received a thank-you letter from her! As I read her letter, the pain in my heart just melted away. I realized that she really did care about me and our relationship. I realized that if it took some time for us to be close friends again, that would be all right, too.

It isn't easy to reach out in forgiveness to those who hurt us, especially when we are hurting. But our only alternative is to choose self-pity and isolation, which leads to loneliness and despair. God commands us to reach beyond our comfort zones and give mercy and compassion to those who have hurt us, just as He has shown mercy and compassion to us. He commands this because He loves us. Forgiveness and reconciliation allow His purposes to prevail in our lives. ◆

Key to Walking the Path of Encouragement

Dear Lord,

Help me to walk in forgiveness with my friends. Give me Your love for them. Help me to see them through Your eyes of mercy and tenderness. Help me not to be offended by their struggles. Help me not to hold their pain against them. I want to help bear the pain, not stand in judgment of it. Help me walk in forgiveness because You so graciously extend forgiveness to me.

Amen.

Many books tell us how to help those who hurt, but there is one person who showed us how to help by what He did in His own life. His name is Jesus. Throughout the Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible—we can read about how Jesus treated His friends and how He reached out to those who suffered from physical ailments. Much of His life on earth focused on relieving the burden of sin and pain and pointing the way to His Father.

Those of us who would be encouragers need to point the way to our loving, heavenly Father as well. God is the one our suffering friend needs most of all. At times we will fail to meet our friend's needs. Our human limitations make it impossible for us to always be there when our friend needs us, but God will never fail or forsake our suffering friend. He is the God who has suffered as well as the God of the suffering. Because of the pain, humiliation, loneliness, and rejection He suffered on our behalf, He knows and understands our suffering.

So the greatest encouragement we can offer is to point our friend to the reality of God's love. The author C.S. Lewis

captures the true essence of encouragement: "When pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all."

God often uses us to demonstrate His love. He can work through us to be His hands that hold the hands of an anxious friend. He can use our mouths to offer comfort to a pain-wracked heart. He can use our feet to walk through dark valleys with a friend. But all that we do is a mere reflection of His perfect and everlasting love. When we lift our friend's eyes toward God, who will always be there, we fulfill the highest calling of an encourager.

God chooses carefully those who would bring His message of hope, comfort, and love to His suffering children. If you have been chosen to be God's hands, mouth, or feet for your friend, God will bless you richly as you let Him teach you His gentle ways and how to walk in His strength. The task may seem far too great for you to bear, but remember, He promised to never leave or forsake you. He will never drop the load that He helps you carry. ◆

The dearest friend on earth is a mere shadow compared to Jesus Christ.

OSWALD CHAMBERS



Points of Interest

*There's a miracle called friendship
That dwells within the heart
And you don't know how it happens
Or when it gets its start . . .
But the happiness it brings you
Always gives a special lift
And you realize that friendship
Is God's most precious gift.*



Information Services

For additional "travel tips" on offering encouragement to those who suffer, please consider the following resources that provide more detailed directions for your journey.

- ▶ *A Medical and Spiritual Guide to Living with Cancer*, by William Fintel, M.D. & Gerald McDermott, Ph.D., Word Publishing. This is a complete handbook for patients and their families. Paper, \$15.
- ▶ *Damaged But Not Broken*, by Larry Burkett with Michael E. Taylor, Moody Press. Larry shares his personal testimony on dealing with cancer. Cloth, \$15.
- ▶ *How to Help a Brokenhearted Friend*, by Dave Biebel, Spire Books. A very practical how-to book written by a man who has walked through personal heart-break. Paper, \$8.
- ▶ *The Power of Encouragement*, by Dr. David Jeremiah, Multnomah Books. Shows how anyone can effectively use hands, feet, eyes, and ears to love and encourage others. Paper, \$12.

These books can be purchased at your local Christian bookstore or ordered from the Outreach of Hope. To order, please write the book title and cost in the "special offer" section of the envelope inside this issue.

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.

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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