

Loving Thy Hurting Neighbor

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Some years ago a lady calling herself "Witness" wrote to Ann Landers, saying she had had breast cancer, had been through a mastectomy and chemotherapy, and then had recently been diagnosed with more cancer. Her family, unfamiliar with cancer, had more or less abandoned her. She was feeling really down until she confided to a friendly man in a coin laundry. The man hugged and comforted her, saying, "I understand. My wife has been through it."

Witness continued:

About 15 minutes went by and in came the man and his wife. She walked over to me and, without saying a word, hugged me. Then she said, "Feel free to talk to me. Once I was where you are now. I know what you are going through." Ann, I can't tell you how much that meant to me. Here was this total stranger, taking her time to give me emotional support and courage to face the future at a time when I was ready to give up. I hope God gives me the chance to do for someone else what that wonderful woman did for me.

The woman who came to comfort Witness sounds like my friend Sandy. Years ago Sandy was diagnosed with breast cancer.



After the surgery, the chemotherapy and the physical therapy, she recovered completely, and has remained cancer-free. From her experience she gained, I believe, not only an appreciation for the preciousness of her own life, but a profound commitment to minister to other hurting people.

Since that time several other women in Sandy's circle of acquaintances have developed breast cancer, or lost a husband, or had some other calamity come upon them. Sandy is always there for them with words of comfort and loving concern. It seems as if she knows that God spared her so she could minister to others in their times of need.

Am I saying that you must go through some calamity in your life so that you can minister to another person who has suffered the same thing? No, absolutely not. Although it's good to be able to say, "I've been where you are and I know what you are going through," often it's enough to be able to say, "I know you're hurting. I hurt with you. I'm here for you."

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

One of the most blessed times of my life was when I regularly visited my friend Fred, who was dying of a brain tumor. I went to his home every Thursday morning, and we would visit and have a cup of coffee, and often pray together. We talked about life and death, God and faith, work and family, baseball and photography, and how it felt to give up his driver's license. After a short

time, a half hour or so, we would part with a smile and a hug, and both look forward to the next Thursday.

I never did Fred any good, really, in the sense of prolonging his earthly life. I did show him a little of God's love, and I think I helped him arrive at a place of peace with the Lord and with his coming death. The real point I want to make here is that ministering to Fred didn't cost me anything. On the contrary, it enriched my life a lot. I was privileged and blessed to be able to spend that time with him, to both give and receive God's peace and comfort. I was awesomely privileged, too, on the morning that Fred died, to be invited by his wife to come over and say goodbye to him before the funeral home came to take his body away.

A time of distress can provide an opportunity for reconciliation; a time to say, "What's past is past, we need to let bygones be bygones. I forgive you whatever it was that you did to offend me, please forgive me for anything I did to offend you. Right now we need each other's comfort and peace." It may take a lot of courage to do that with someone from whom you have been estranged for months or years. If you ask God, I believe He will provide the courage and the occasion, and also prepare the other person's heart to receive it.

Even if this does not "work," in the sense of bringing about the reconciliation you intended, at least you will have done what you could and planted a seed of love that may bring fruit later on. We should always do what God asks us to do, and leave the question of results to Him.

There are always opportunities to minister comfort and concern. As I was originally writing this message, several years ago, my friend Nancy was ten days away from some heavy-duty back surgery. If everything went perfectly it would involve three months in a full body cast, and who knows what therapy

and pain after that. And there was by no means any guarantee that all would go well.

I offered to come to Nancy's home and pray with her before her surgery. "Oh, yes," she said, "please do." It was not a big deal for me — an hour or two of my time, perhaps — but it was a big deal for Nancy. When we knelt together before the throne of grace to ask for peace for Nancy and her family, we were confident that God would surely grant it. When we prayed for skill for the doctors and nurses, successful surgery, and rapid healing, we knew God would grant those things, too — unless He had a better plan. But nearly as important as the prayer was the fact that God's love could operate through me to love and comfort Nancy in her time of need.

"Friendship doubles our joy and divides our grief," some anonymous sage once said. If you are suffering, you should be alert for tentative overtures from friendly persons who might like to offer you support and comfort, but perhaps don't know how. Maybe you can help them get started. If you are not suffering — or, indeed, even if you are — you can find opportunities and ways to reach out to someone else who is hurting. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," Jesus said, and I can testify that I have found it to be so. I hope that you know it, too.

Grace, Comfort, and Peace to you. May you abound in doing the good works God has prepared for you to do.

Brother Roland



**To subscribe or ask a Bible question, write to
Bro. Roland, PO Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222**

Inmates: include your SID number.

The Empty Chair (From www.jaredstory.com/)

A man's daughter had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father. When the pastor arrived he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The pastor assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit.

"I guess you were expecting me," he said.

"No, who are you?"

"I'm the new associate at your local church," the pastor replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh, yeah, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?" Puzzled, the pastor shut the door.

"I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man, "but all my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head.

"I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the man continued, "until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because He promised, 'I'll be with you always.' Then just speak to Him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now.'

"So I tried it, and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon.

"Did he seem to be at peace?" the pastor asked.

"Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange—kinda weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed."

RULES FOR *Daily Life*

Begin the day with God

Kneel down to Him in prayer
Lift up thy heart to His abode
And seek His love to share.

Open the Book of God

And read a portion there,
That it may hallow all thy thoughts
And sweeten all thy care.

Go through the day with God

Whate'er thy work may be:
Where'er thou art—at home, abroad,
He still is near to thee.

Converse in mind with God

Thy spirit heavenward raise;
Acknowledge every good bestowed,
And offer grateful praise.

Conclude the day with God

Thy sins to Him confess;
Trust in the Lord's atoning blood
And plead His righteousness.

Lie down at night with God

Who gives His servants sleep;
And when thou tread'st the vale of death,
He will thee guard and keep.

(From "Life Management for Busy Women"
by Elizabeth George)

The "Peace Prayer" of St. Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where
there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt,
faith; where there is despair, hope; where there
is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.*

*O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
seek to be consoled as to console; to be
understood as to understand; to be loved as to
love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in
pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying
that we are born again to eternal life.*

God's Peace Be with You

The "Peace of God" is beyond our understanding—and yet it is God's desire that we live in His peace and extend it to others. Enjoy the puzzle.

Puzzle:

T G R A T I T U D E G F B E E A I P D O D P K Y N S G M F V W P
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M S E I G D I D B S I N C F N Y T I R U C E S L Q K Z N E K D J
U E S M S N I U R S T O K Z O U F T I W Y W U Y B U L L Y I N G
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X E S S S D R L G E I N U J C C S W G I L V G E N E R O S I T Y
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S S R W K P M O E F N F C E A F K E W E Q S N I S G L Q D S I A
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R D N H I C D S H U F F O N S Y Q C S E U A Y F V H E O C P S P
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A J S D P A H D I C A L M S D U N L H T O O G K I L S N N S U Y
T R S I R O A E F T W I H S R H U T S H N C Y I H L N R S S N X
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Y P L C V Q I N N S V K F Z N U G P A E C E N E M L A T I N I D
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S S E N I H T R O W T S U R T B I T Y A G O G L N T M E P W T I
A F O R G I V E N E S S M C S E Z U S T Y R I E E R M L S A Y W
F V P G N I D N A T S R E D N U S I M I A E S V U C R E O S I I
P I H S W O L L E F U C Q C P P Y V T O D S R T O S T U N V J N
S I E A J Y Z I V N D S E D G K S S E N L U F T H G U O H T E F

Words:

* Against Peace

AGITATION
ANGER
ANXIETY
ARGUMENTS
BULLYING
CONFUSION
CONTENTION
CRUELTY
DISOBEDIENCE
DISSATISFACTION
DISTRUST
ENVY
FEAR
FIGHTING
FRUSTRATION
GRUDGES
HATRED
IMPATIENCE
INSULTS

JEALOUSY
MEANNESS
MISTREATMENT
MISUNDERSTANDING
NEGLECT
PAIN
PREJUDICE
PRIDE
SELFISHNESS
SPITE
STRESS
STUBBORNNESS
TURMOIL
UNCERTAINTY
UNFORGIVENESS
VENGEFULNESS
VIOLENCE
WICKEDNESS
WORRY

* For Peace

AFFIRMATION
AGREEMENT
BLESSING
CARING
COMFORT
CONSIDERATION
CONTENTMENT
COOPERATION
ENCOURAGEMENT
FAIRNESS
FAITHFULNESS
FELLOWSHIP
FORGIVENESS
FRIENDSHIP
GENEROSITY
GENTLENESS
GOODNESS
GRATITUDE
HELPFULNESS
HONESTY

HUMILITY
KINDNESS
LOVE
LOYALTY
MERCY
OPENNESS
PATIENCE
PRAYER
QUIET
RECONCILIATION
RESTFULNESS
SECURITY
SELF CONTROL
SMILES
TENDERNESS
THOUGHTFULNESS
TRUTHFULNESS
TRUSTWORTHINESS
UNSELFISHNESS
WISDOM