

MOURN WITH THOSE WHO MOURN



Just being there matters most.  by PETER ROSENBERGER

A PASTOR FRIEND of mine recently recalled his oral examination before his ordination. The examining board asked which Scripture he would share with someone in emotional trauma.

He told the examining board, “I can tell you the one I would not use: Romans 8:28. ‘We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.’”

He told the surprised board that many Christians seemed to share that passage too quickly with those in distress. Instead of bringing comfort, he felt some used it to button up the grief, distance themselves from others’ sufferings, exit painful circumstances, and make the whole unpleasantness seem more spiritual.

Thinking of how I’d respond to that examination board, I recalled a Scripture that continues to

intrigue me — Job 2:13. “They sat on the ground with him seven days and nights, but no one spoke a word to him because they saw that his suffering was very intense.”

It isn’t easy to be silent with someone who grieves and suffers. Affliction is uncomfortable to experience — and watch. Job’s friends did it, but when they finally broke their silence, God allowed 30-plus chapters of poor theology in order to demonstrate the futility of guessing about the motives of the Almighty. People in trauma require comfort, not speculating about God’s plans.

Jesus stated, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). When raging, despairing, or “putting on a good face,” we fail to mourn — and remain without comfort. Mourning involves accepting what is and grieving over the brokenness. Furthermore, grieving takes as long as it takes, and it cannot be coerced. We can sit with those who suffer and strengthen them with our presence, but the sermons and well-worn phrases must wait at the door. The grief-stricken have their own timetable, and we respect their trauma by providing company more than words — companionship through the often-long valley of the shadow of death.

Nearly 40 years ago, my wife lay bleeding, trapped in her mangled car by the side of the highway after a devastating car accident. Each truck driver who stopped and the paramedics they summoned said the same things while desperately working to extricate her from the crushed automobile.

“We’re here.”

“Help’s here.”

“Stay with us.”

“We’re going to get you to safety.”

“You’re not alone.”

They never chastised her for having a wreck. They didn’t quote Scriptures, try to fix her, or hypothesize why God allowed

such a thing. Instead, they repeatedly assured her of their presence and commitment to help.

Painful circumstances require few words — there will be time for those later. Sometimes all we can do is figuratively (or literally) hold their hair back while they throw up and then give them a clean towel afterward. In doing so, we mourn with those who mourn and “comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor. 1:4).

The world is reeling in trauma and fear. Whether political upheaval, gender issues, dissolved marriages, broken families, sickness, or injuries, there seems to be an unending source of heartache, and many are isolated while trapped in their own twisted wrecks, bleeding by the side of the road.

The truck drivers who stopped to help my wife had no medical or pastoral training. Through choked voices filled with grief, they called for help and stayed with her until help arrived; some even later visited her in the hospital. None of them had to face an oral examination of what passage they would use to console someone in trauma. Those truckers comforted with their presence and commitment to care.

As believers, we are all called to minister to those who are sick, outcast, hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned — our Savior remains clear about that directive. Sometimes it’s simply sitting silently with those in grief. Doing so often provides the opportunity to agonize, to groan, to mourn.

Psalm 34:18 shares that “the LORD is near the brokenhearted.”

Are we? 🙏

“We can sit with those who suffer and strengthen them with our presence.”

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