

20 Ways to Help a Loved One in Need

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" ~Matthew 25:40

(1)

Instead of saying, "Let me know if I can help," rephrase it to "I sincerely want to help. Please tell me what I can do. I mean this with all my heart." This is the bare minimum. They will still probably not tell you how you can help. Most people wouldn't.

(2)

Give them a written list of ways you can help and say, "Pick three." Stand there until they do, or say you'll call in a day or two to get an answer.

(3)

Can you cook? Everyone needs to eat. Tell the family you will be bringing dinner some time this week (or every Wednesday for a month), and to pick the best date for them. That leaves no asking on their part--just thanking. Be sure you ask about food sensitivities. While they would appreciate any food, often the family-in-crisis resorts to quick and filling and would love something healthy and homemade.

(4)

Slip a grocery or gas card in their mailbox or hand. Everyone needs those. If you're a close friend or family member, steal the car (when they don't need it) and fill it with gas; consider running it through a car wash and vacuuming up the Cheerios, too.

(5)

Drop a bag of groceries off at their home, maybe with a movie or game tucked inside. Tell them you're coming and say, "Set a cooler out front to let me know you're too tired for company, and I won't come in. If there's no cooler, I'll knock."

(6)

Are you good with kids? Say this: "I would love to pick your kids up Thursday and bring them over for crafts and cookie baking if you're comfortable with that. Otherwise, I would be more than happy to come and watch them so you can run errands or take a shower and a nap. Don't feel obligated to socialize with me."

(7)

Say this: "I'm coming over to do your laundry. No arguments! I've seen dirty undies before, so don't hide them before I get there." (That last part is important.)

(8)

Say this: "I'm coming over to clean your house, not because you're a slob, but because you need a break. You can take a nap while I'm cleaning. *Don't* clean before I get there." Or give them a gift certificate for a cleaning person with the same "not because you're a slob" explanation.

(9)

If you live far away, say this: "I really want to help. Would it be helpful if I came and stayed, or would it be more work to have me there. *Please be honest.*" And while you're there, *please help*. Sometimes "helpful" guests are far more work than help.

(10)

If you live far away or don't have the time, order food to be delivered. You can also have toilet paper and other necessities delivered through Amazon.

(11)

Go with them. Visiting doctors and hearing diagnoses are scary. Funeral arrangements are confusing. Bankruptcy proceedings are humiliating. Go along and hold a hand.

(12)

Send cards, emails, and well-wishes often. *Often!* People generally offer help and sympathy immediately after a trying event, such as a death or diagnosis; the prayers and sentiments commonly fall off after a couple months, but the pain remains.

(13)

Get techy. Ask if they are on Care Pages, Caring Bridge, or another online update site via which you can follow their medical progress. Comment often on the site. Get the Stand With app and encourage your friend or family member to do the same.

(14)

Sit with them. Some people simply want to feel less lonely, less scared, less... different. Sit with them and chat, laugh, cry, pray. First, put your phone away.

(15)

Be understanding. Sometimes fear and pain elicit the worst in people; be patient through these moments.

(16)

Ask. Then listen. Nothing's worse than the whole world pretending your problem doesn't exist, or switching the conversation to their cat or their kid's grades every time they bring up their struggle. Well, I'm sure something's worse than that, but when a loved one is immersed in pain, being ignored or compared to someone's cat or a 3rd grade report card belittles the hurt.

(17)

Give the family or couple some movie tickets and offer to sit with all the kids or with the ill person. During a crisis, couple and family time becomes time spent in doctors' offices and waiting rooms--not the most ideal setting. Often the financial toll a situation takes is almost as intense as the main issue--what may be no biggie to you is huge to that family, like a couple movie tickets or a trip to the zoo.

(18)

Take over their volunteer work at church or elsewhere...with permission, of course.

(19)

Enlist a group of people to provide meals, take babysitting shifts, visit, whatever! Look within your church for this group--even if the person doesn't attend a church, it's a great introduction to the imperfect but loving heart of the Christian.

(20)

Listen. (I know I already said this, but it's important.) Let them grumble, cry, scream, sulk, throw a pity party, *whatever!* And don't say anything inane or critical in the process. What your loved one is going through is *hard*--if you haven't been there, you can't comprehend the depth of the pain and fear. Don't judge, don't gossip, don't try to fix it, don't say, "well if you only...", don't roll your eyes, don't leave--just listen.

One final note: please don't expect a thank you note. People are in such a haze during trying times, that sometimes they can't recall who helped or how they survived, much less muster the energy to write a note. Do it for the person, not for the credit.