

## HELPING IN COMMUNITY AND THE CERTAINTY OF HOPE

**“We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”**

(Romans 5:3–4)

Problems are complex, and helping someone in the context of a group, in which all of us will pray for and help the one in need, is ideal. There will be times when limits to our human gifts, abilities, and experience create the need for cohelpers. Picture a community—a church—being side by side with us as we know and help others.

God has purposes in hardships, and the grandest purpose is that we would trust him. God’s own master story is a story of hope. By trusting in Jesus, not only do we personally know forgiveness of sins, we also have the hope of seeing Jesus face to face.

When we walk side by side, in community, with a fellow sufferer in wisdom and love, we bring God and the suffering together. We bring light into claustrophobic darkness, where our friend might feel alone and

without hope. Where chronic suffering assumes that nothing will ever change, hope knows that our rescuer is committed to our good.

Hope knows the love of Jesus and grows in confidence that all the promises of God have already found their yes in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

**“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”**

(Revelation 21:3–4)

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## SIDE BY SIDE BY SIDE BY SIDE

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

We all need help and we are all helpers—that’s part of being human. We need help for our souls, especially while going through hardships. We weren’t designed to go through hard things alone.

But what does it look like to help each other well? The people who help best are people who both need help and give help—being able to share their burdens and to bear the burdens of others. A healthy community depends on all of us being both.

### NEEDY AND NEEDED

**“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this [hardship], that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”**  
(2 Corinthians 12:8–9)

The ability to help and be helped begins by acknowledging our own human weakness and dependence on God. If you feel weak and ordinary—if you feel like a mess but have the Spirit—you have the right credentials. You are one of the ordinary people God uses to help others.

As helpers, we are also needed. With wisdom from the Holy Spirit, we move toward others when they’re in need.

Once the greetings are over, the pleasure of knowing someone begins. This means having thoughtful conversations—ones that go below the surface niceties. What follows is a fulfilling, though not always easy, process of sharing stories, expressing compassion during times of trouble, and having difficult discussions about sin.

We don’t aim to draw out problems so that we can be helpers. We are simply interested in knowing another person, which is a basic feature of everyday love.

## COMING ALONGSIDE TO HELP

**“We love because he first loved us.”**  
(1 John 4:19)

Because most people do not ask for help, we can take the initiative, just as God first moved toward us as an expression of his love.

Walking alongside someone who is going through hardship means making time for that person, maybe at a child’s ball game, or at church, or over coffee, or during a small group meeting. It means having conversations that go beneath the surface, hearing what’s on his or her heart, and praying for and together with the person.

As people who are needed, we can ask to hear our friend’s story. The better you know other people, the more you enjoy, appreciate, pray with, and love them. And the more you love them, the more they will invite you into their lives in times of hardship. We can see the same positioning in Jesus’s life on earth—he is Immanuel, God with us.