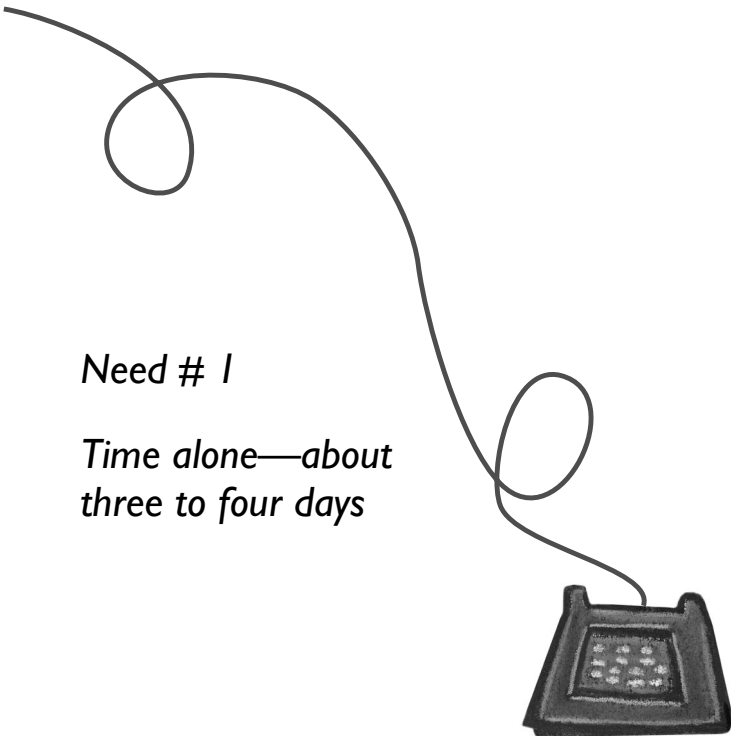


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The Fog



Need # 1

*Time alone—about
three to four days*

The news was not good. It was cancer. My middle-aged husband was facing the fight of his life. Our immediate response was shock. Our first impulse, our first emotional need, our primal *necessity* was time alone—a time of solace to absorb the news and attempt to escape the fog that seemed to suffocate our very being.

The fog emerged almost immediately and trapped our intellect, reasoning and even our emotions in what seemed like a thick, white murkiness that was inescapable.

It felt as if we were driving down an unfamiliar road on a dark, cold night, straining to find our way, shrouded by thick smog. The situation controlled us as surely as if we were its captives.

Slowly, ever-so-slowly, the fog seemed to lift and then reappear.

As a friend to a befogged person, initially give the family the gift of time. Don't besiege them with telephone calls or visits asking questions and/or giving advice. Allow them "absorption time."

If you are a close friend, you might volunteer to serve as the family's "coordinator" in sharing initial medical information with friends and in serving as the contact person for those bringing meals. Concerned friends can contact the coordinator and learn of needs they can pray about or physically assist with.

An example would be Renee, a dear friend whose husband was recently diagnosed with a brain tumor. Upon returning home from a long day at the hospital, she found her kitchen floor flooded! Within minutes, she discovered a broken icemaker water line. The coordinator learned of the incident and arranged to meet a plumber the next day.

In addition, Renee's friends called the coordinator to arrange the gift of meals. This reduced confusion and the problem of having too much or not enough food, prevented the giver from taking the same meal (like roast or spaghetti) as another, and created clarity about the number of persons to be fed.

The coordinator would then make one call to Renee and advise her of the delivery schedule. Friends liked the efficiency of having a coordinator because they felt they could call anytime for an update and that the needs of the patient and family were being met.

4 *Call Me If You Need Anything*

Many times, the family is advised to "get business affairs in order" before treatment begins. Spiritual, financial, and attitude decisions must be made to positively steer into the future.

Sitting at the kitchen table the morning after the diagnosis, my husband and I agreed that bitterness was not an option. Years earlier, we knew a couple who had lost their only child in a car accident. We watched as their grief turned to anger and anger into bitterness and bitterness into progressively caustic behavior. Months turned into years, and their corrosive spirit alienated friends, family, God-sent opportunities, and the ability to enjoy even the simplest joys. We learned that the price of bitterness was too high, and we vowed not to pay it, no matter the challenges we faced.

For several days, our next door neighbors, Sam and Ghada, brought a small meal each evening. Our appetites were small—food didn't seem a priority. What did she do to entice us? Cleverly, she prepared all our favorite dishes! Her acts of kindness ministered to our hearts and strengthened us physically for the days ahead.

Preparing for treatment can be compared somewhat to going to school for the first time. You feel overwhelmed, scared, and you're not sure if you're big

enough to go! Just like school supplies, you need hospital supplies. These supplies make wonderful and practical gifts.

The first thing you might give is a spiral notebook or three-ring binder with a pen. Section the notebook! Make the first section for important phone and cell numbers. The second section is for notes. The caregiver uses this section for information the physician shares. This sounds unnecessary, but fatigue quickly robs clarity. The notes become invaluable in remembering what the doctor said. The third section is for a daily diary. This historical information tracks treatment and reactions. It serves as a road map in anticipating symptoms in subsequent treatments or hospitalizations.

A calendar is a priority. Treatments, appointments, and hospitalizations are posted for personal organization. Without a calendar, and more quickly than you can imagine, the family will be asking, "What day of the week is it?"

Like an apple for the teacher, candy is a must—for the nurses! The gift of candy gives the patient an opportunity to show appreciation without the extra expense. Give a large plastic bowl and bags of individually wrapped candy. This small gift will bring smiles to both the nurses and the patient.

6 *Call Me If You Need Anything*

Days pass, and like a haze that disappears with the warmth of the sun, the haze lifts from the mind. The time of absorption is over—reality is as clear as mid-morning.

The first immediate need is time alone—about three to four days.