Walking With Others Through Life's Challenges

LIFE / CGYG Fellowship Program
January 25, 2019

Outline

PART ONE: FOUNDATION OF SUFFERING

- “What/Why” of Suffering
- Why care about each other’s suffering

PART TWO: WALKING WITH OTHERS

- “How”

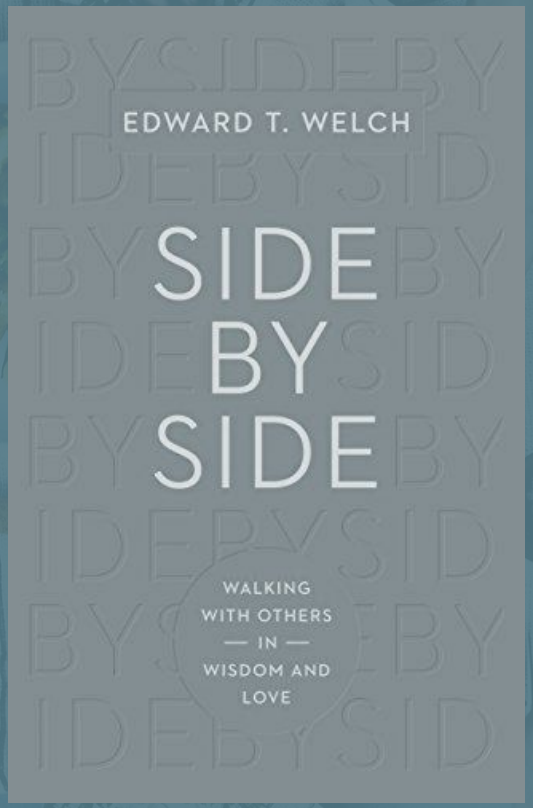
PART THREE: PRACTICAL APPLICATION

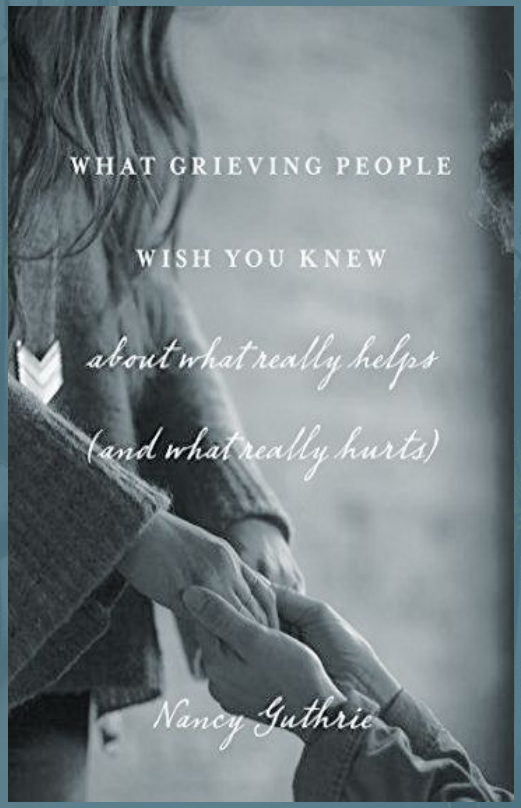
- Your turn!

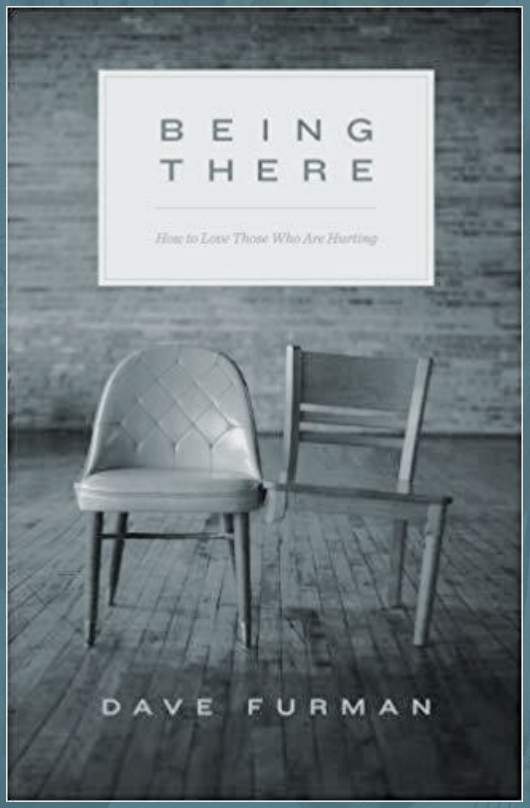
Objectives

- Recognize that suffering is a guaranteed part of everyone's life: keep in mind that EVERY person is going through SOMETHING (past, present, and future)
- Be emboldened to enter in and "suffer with" rather than create distance
- Discover practical ways to lovingly and wisely walk with others in their suffering

Resources


EDWARD T. WELCH
SIDE BY SIDE
WALKING WITH OTHERS — IN — WISDOM AND LOVE


WHAT GRIEVING PEOPLE WISH YOU KNEW
about what really helps (and what really hurts)
Nancy Guthrie


BEING THERE
How to Love Those Who Are Hurting
DAVE FURMAN

PART ONE

Foundation of Suffering

Definition of Suffering

Suffering is the experience of and the enduring of life's challenges

Examples:

- Unemployment
- Personal health issue
- Loss of loved one
- Work/school stress
- Conflict with others
- _____

False Beliefs About Suffering

- *“Low-grade suffering is common; you just deal with it. Really bad suffering means you have done something really wrong, and God is displeased.”*
- *“We all have hardships, but our good Father will give us the ability to bear it, which means that it won’t feel that bad.”*
- *“We all have hardships. Christians have them a little less than their pagan neighbours.”*
- *“We must praise our way through it.”*
- *“Think of those worse off than you and be thankful.”*

On Suffering

- Inevitable part of this life as a result of fallen people living in a fallen world (**Gen 3:16-19)**
- God's sovereignty over all areas of life, including suffering (**Job 1:9-12**)
- For His glory and our good (**1 Pet 4:12-13, Jn 9:1-3, Rom 8:28**)
- Christ is victorious over sin, death and has overcome the world (**1 Cor 15:55-57, Jn 16:33**)
- Christ is with us in our suffering, He identifies with us in our suffering (**Heb 4:14-16, 13:5)**
- Suffering will come to an end one day (**Rev 21:1-4**)

JOHN 16:33

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

God's Revealed Purposes

1. To Grow us in Holiness
2. To Build Endurance and to Grow us in Maturity
3. To Teach us His Word
4. **To Enable us to Walk with Others**
5. To Wean us off Self-Reliance
6. To Strengthen our Faith
7. To Glorify God

God's Revealed Purposes for Suffering

- To grow us in maturity (**Heb 12:10-11**)
- To build endurance (**Rom 5:3-5, Jas 1:2-3**)
- To teach us His Word (**Psa 119:71**)
- To wean us off self-reliance (**2 Cor 1:8-9**)
- To strengthen our faith (**1 Pet 1:6-7**)
- To glorify God (**2 Cor 12:7-9**)

>> Enable us to Walk with Others <<

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

“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 with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

GALATIANS 6:2

“Bear one another’s burdens , and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

ROMANS 12:15

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

No One-Size-Fits-All

TYPE OF PERSON	TYPE OF LIFE CHALLENGE	ACTION	OUTCOME
TYPE A	X	Cooking lactose meals to one who is intolerant	= guaranteed comfort
TYPE B	Y	Extended calls/texts at night when he/she is a morning bird	= guaranteed support
TYPE AB	Z	Together watching sappy Asian dramas	= guaranteed tear-free

PART TWO

Walking with Others

1. Greet One Another
2. Have Thoughtful Conversations
3. Walk Together, Tell Stories
4. Have Compassion during Trouble
5. Keep *The* Story in View

Move Toward & Greet One Another

God Moves Toward Us

- God always takes the initiative (**Gen 3:8-9, Hosea 1:2**)
- Jesus stepped down from His throne and entered into man's daily life; He pursued and invited the marginalized to be with Him
- God has moved toward us with grace → We move toward others in His name
  - including those we may not particularly want to help
- **How? We start small - We greet people**

Greet One Another

- Greetings are not just polite manners from a bygone era
- Greeting one another imitates the Lord, shows respect and kindness to others (**1 Cor 16:20, Mark 9:37**)
  - Command equally applies to those who find it natural, and those who feel awkward or more introverted
  - Pray to grow in this feature of God's character
- Instead of talking to those who are familiar/similar, we greet the visitor, stranger, marginalized as Jesus did
- How much do we care about those we don't know well?

Have Thoughtful Conversations

Designed for Connection

- We are designed to connect with others. We're hardwired to know and be known.
- These connections are expressions of love and the foundations for mutual help
- How do we forge relational connections?
  - Begin with normal interactions/conversations
  - Ask questions to hear what is important to someone in order to enter into his/her world
  - Pray for him/her
  - Follow up the next time we see him/her
  - This enables us to walk side by side with him/her

Start Somewhere

- Often we begin with an initial script (a few prepared remarks and stock questions)
  - What's your name?
  - What kind of work do you do?
  - Where do you live? Where did you grow up?
  - What are you doing for the holidays?
  - How have you been?
- Building blocks toward deeper conversations

Follow the Affections

- Learn what is important to the person we're talking to (listen for important details)
- Hear what is on his/her heart
- Listen for what is dear to them, what is loved, what is feared, what is prized, what is hard → listen for how someone *feels*
- We don't aim to draw out problems just so that we can "help" or "fix" - we are simply interested in knowing another person, which is a basic feature of love

Follow the Affections

- PSALM 139: 1 - God “knows” us = He knows our pleasures, griefs, loves, loathings, and He has us in his heart
- Aim not for facts, but stories that reveal emotions, affection, hopes, fears, griefs (personal knowledge)
    - Question about health can reveal thankfulness or fear
    - Question about holidays can reveal pleasure or pain

Questions Lead to Prayer

- Ask questions that get beyond responses like “Good”
  - “How are you” → “How are *you*, *really?* How has your week been?”
  - “How is work?” → “How is work *really* going for you?”
  - “How is school?” → “Has there been anything you have especially enjoyed? Any plans for next year?”
- As we become moved by the things that move someone else, we pray for him/her or ask how we can pray for him/her
- Find God’s place in their stories

Prayer

- Once we pray with/for someone, we enter into the ongoing story of his/her life
- Allows us to follow up the next time we see him/her
  - “I have been praying for your relationship with your boss and that you’ll have patience, wisdom, and confidence that God is with you. How is it going?”
- COLOSSIANS 1:9; EPHESIANS 1:16 - Paul’s example

  “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you…”

Walk Together, Tell Stories

Understand One Another

- As you learn more about someone, notice character qualities; gifts and talents; pleasures and preferences; spiritual vitality
- Follow up or draw out more when you notice turning points, influential moments in their stories/sharing
  - “Your move in fifth grade seemed to be a huge change for you”
  - “Could you tell me more about your family? They seemed really important to your story”
- If unsure, just ask!
- “What is most meaningful to you about this?” “What was the hardest part of this experience for you?”

Enjoy One Another

- Look for the good in others → this will encourage others and increase our affection for them
- As relationships grow, they become more open, more loving, more encouraging, and more helpful
- The more you love and understand someone, the more you will be invited into their lives during hardships

Have Compassion during Trouble

Compassion

- The steps we take to help others are actually simple reminders about how to be a friend. A vital component of friendship is compassion.
- During hardship, we want to show compassion and communicate:
  - “I am so sorry”
  - “I am with you in this”
- When we hear of hardship, we demonstrate that we, too, are not quite the same

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

Romans 12:15

Compassion Remembers

- If we are affected by someone's suffering, we REMEMBER it
  - We commit to keeping others on our heart long-term
- God bears our burdens and remembers us

GALATIANS 6:2

> "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

- Act/speak in a way that lets others know that you remember them

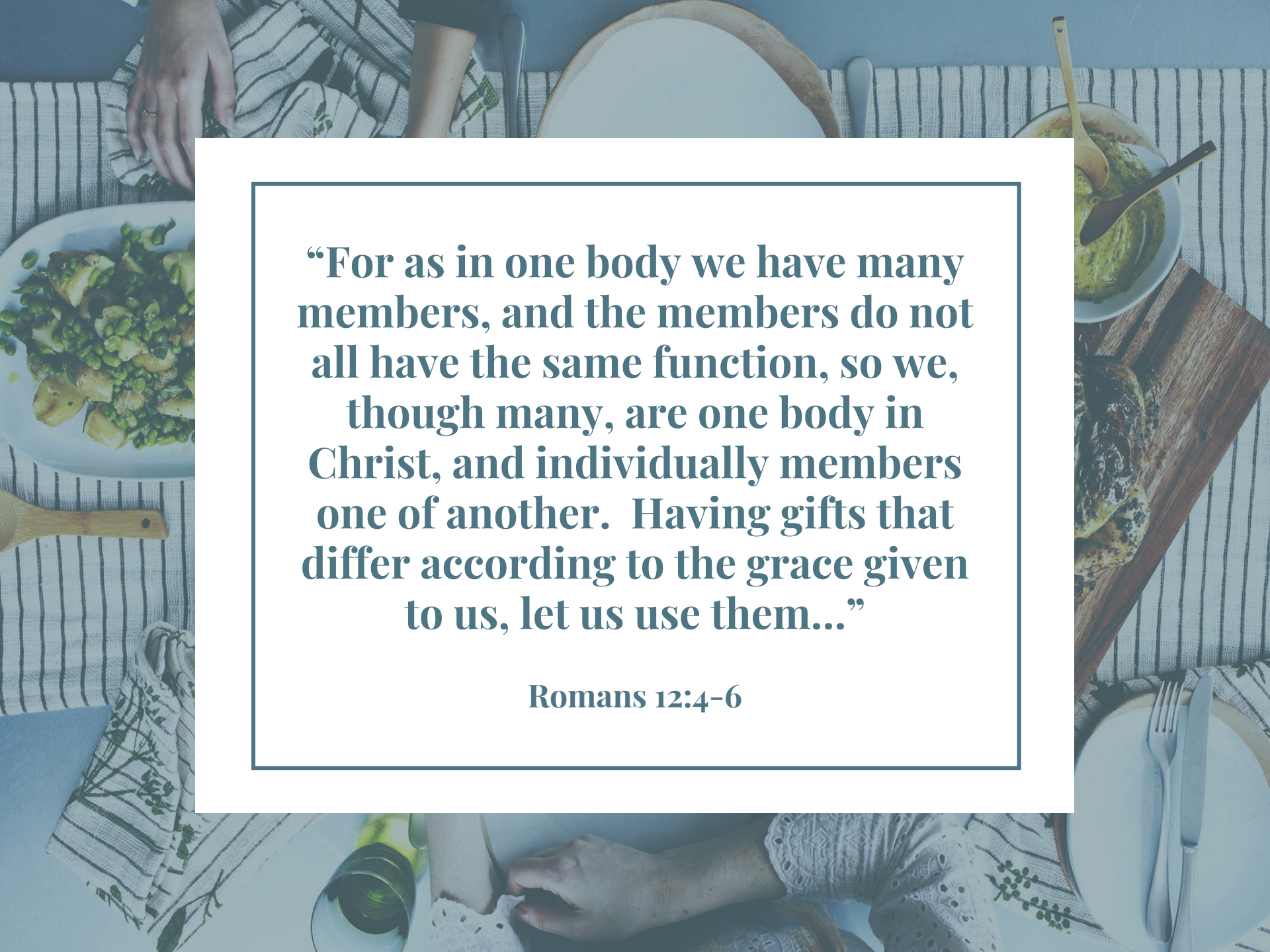
Potential Barriers to Engage

Assumptions that we make:

- “We are not close friends”
  - New friendships can be formed
  - We are brothers and sisters in Christ
- “They probably want to be left alone”
  - There is a time to leave them alone
  - There is a time to pursue them as they may isolate themselves for an extended period of time
- “Will probably say/do something wrong or hurtful”
  - There is always risk when you interact with others, proceed with wisdom, compassion and humility
  - Never underestimate your potential to bless others through God’s Spirit at work in and through you

"The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught."

Isaiah 50:4



“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them…”

Romans 12:4-6

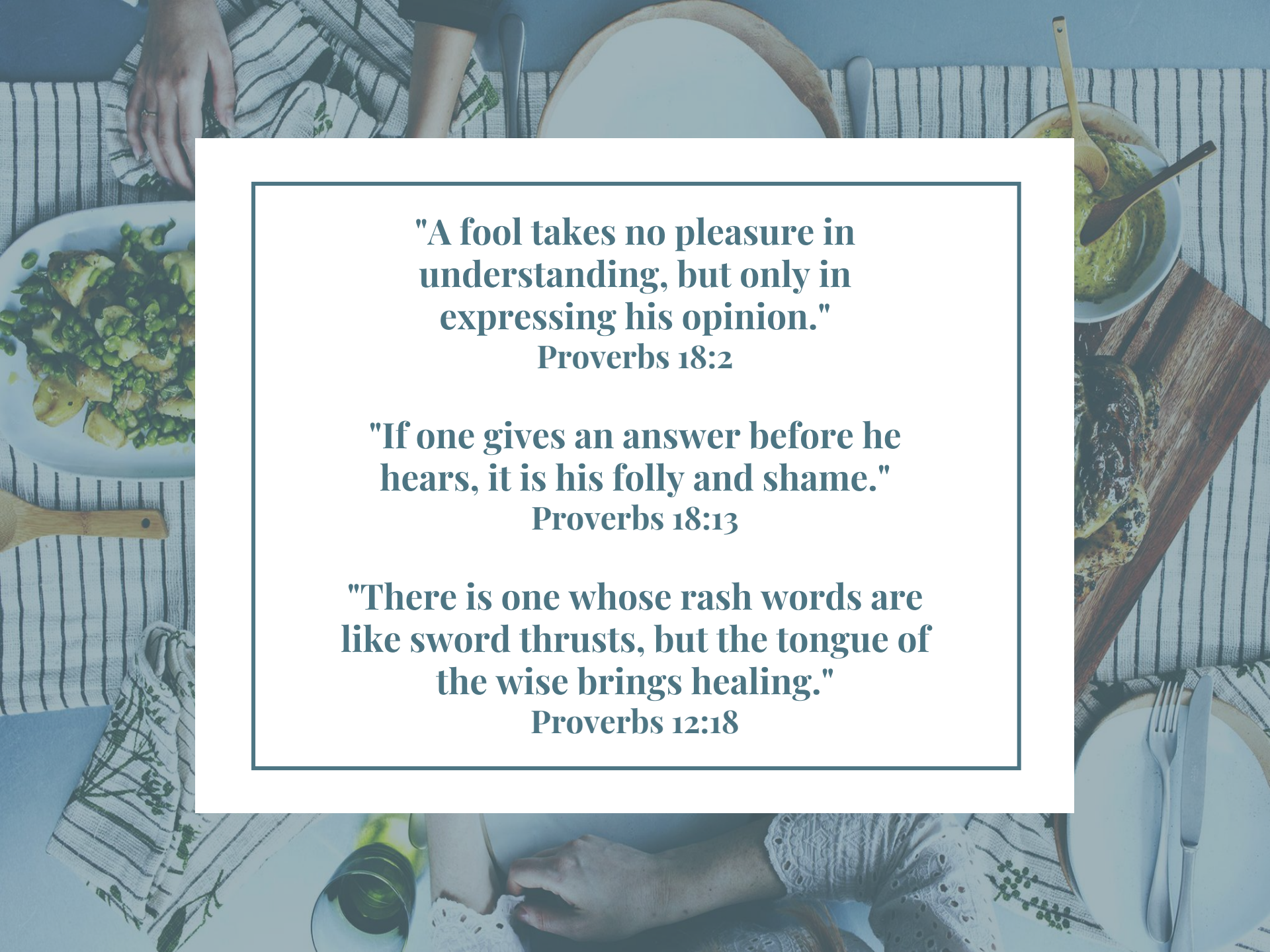
On What to Say...

How do you formulate what to say? It depends:

- Nature of your relationship with the person
- Where that person is at in the process of grief/suffering

Helpful things to remember:

- You are not a hero - it's not up to you to make the pain go away
- Each person is unique in their response to suffering
- What is helpful to one person may not be for another person
- Allow the person to take the lead in stating their feelings, thoughts
- Timing is KEY



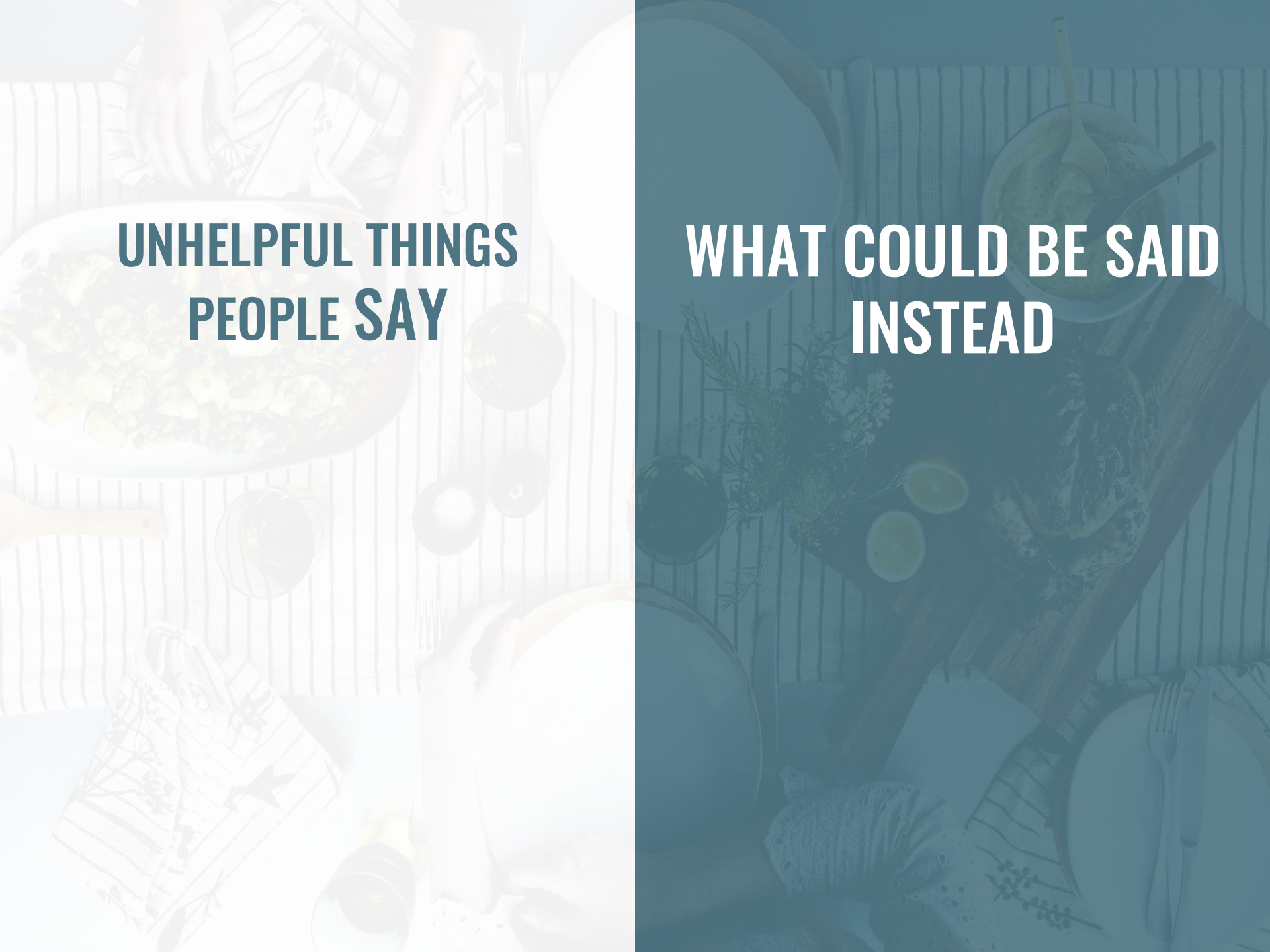
"A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."
Proverbs 18:2

"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame."
Proverbs 18:13

"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
Proverbs 12:18

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD



DANGER OF NOT SAYING ANYTHING AT ALL

"It wasn't so much what people said that hurt, what hurt was when people said nothing at all."

"If I were going through some big, happy life change, it would be very strange if you didn't acknowledge it. The grief and loss I am experiencing are no less life-changing."

WHAT YOU COULD SAY AND DO

Acknowledge the suffering:
"I heard about what happened. I'm so sorry to hear what you are going through."

Nonverbal hand on the shoulder and making eye contact

"I don't know what to say"

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

“I know (exactly) what you’re going through”

Or

“I know how you feel”

WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD

“I don’t presume to know exactly how you feel, but I’m so sorry you have to bear it.”

“What is your grief like these days?”

“Help me understand how you’re feeling.”

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

“This reminds me of when I was….
(story or personal analogy of a similar experience) ”

WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD

“I can’t fully imagine what this must be like for you, but I’m so sorry you have to bear it.”

“Though I have experienced loss, I don’t claim to know what you are going through.”

“I’m so sorry, help me better understand what you’re going through.”

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

“It could be worse... (...imagine _____)”

“Well, at least….”

“It’s not as bad as….”

WHAT COULD BE SAID AND DONE INSTEAD

Don’t say anything at all and listen to them

Be there for and with them

Validate their grief/loss

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

“God must be trying to teach you something through this.”

“This is all in God’s will and plan,” etc.

WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD

“I don’t fully understand why God would have this in His plan for your life; I don’t have answers. But I am asking God to give us faith to trust His plans and purposes.”

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY	WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD
“How are you?”	“How are you doing TODAY or RIGHT NOW?”
	“I thought of you today and prayed for you. Are there particular things I could be praying for you during this time?”

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

"Don't forget – (recite verses about the purpose of suffering)"

"You just need to have more faith / trust / gratitude / see the silver lining"

WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD

"I am praying for you daily / today"

Expand on ***how*** you are praying for them

(ie. what are you praying for?)

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY

"If you need anything, please call me, anytime."

WHAT COULD BE SAID INSTEAD

Consider what needs to be done (with wisdom!) and make a few suggestions, or do it:

- "Can I watch the kids today?"
- "Do you need a ride to your treatment?"
- "Do you have dinner plans?"
- "I am buying groceries, do you want (food that they like)? I can come drop it off later."
- "What can I do to help?"
- 'What do you need right now?"

Things You Can Say

Two things that grieving people from Guthrie's survey wished people would say:

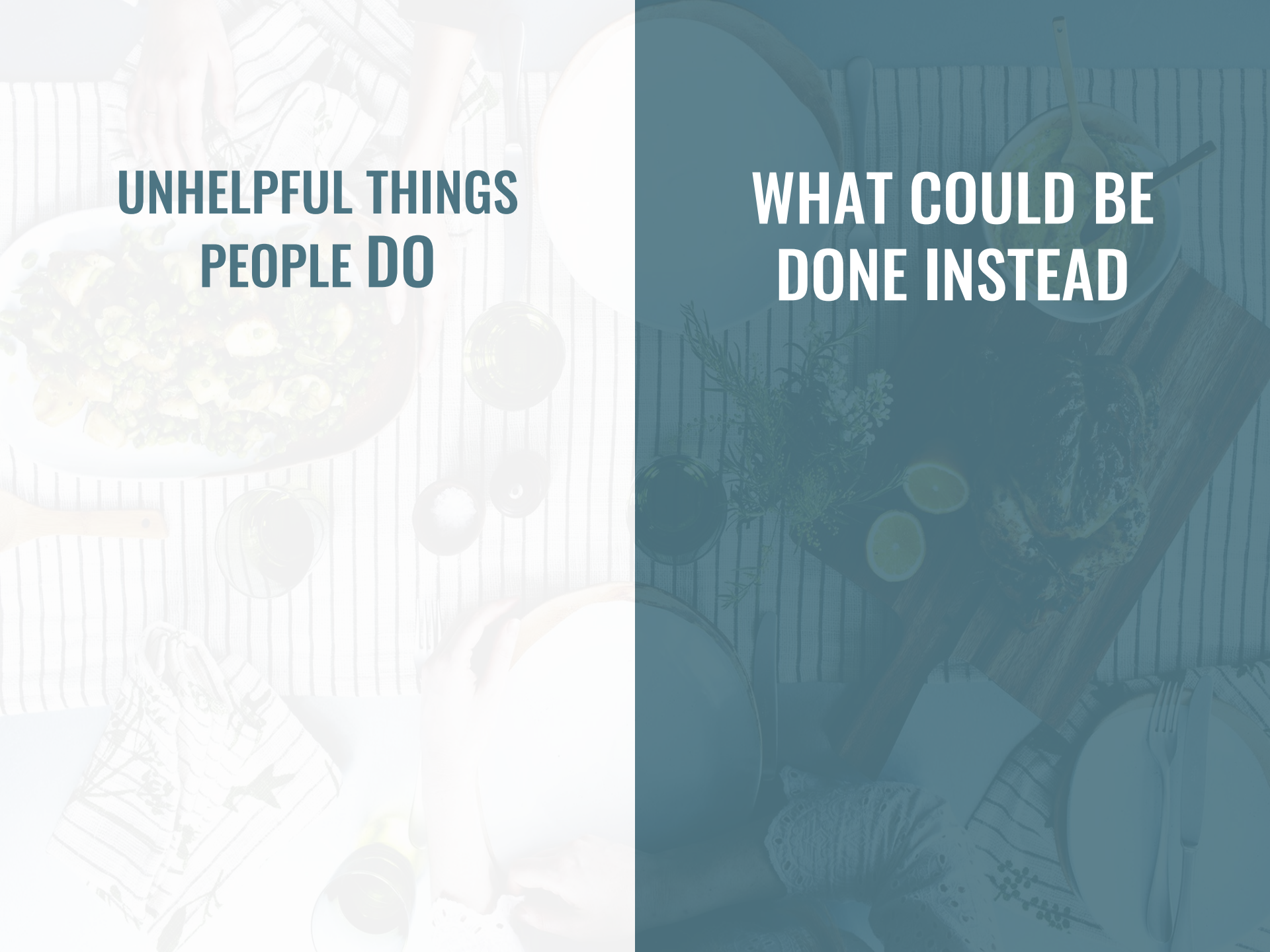
1. Stories of the person who has passed away and *specific* things they did that were meaningful or memorable
   - "It always amazed me how he/she….."
   - "I was extremely blessed by Greg's……."
2. The person's name
   - Don't be fearful to mention the person's name
   - It's music to a heart that has lost its song

Ministry of Presence

- Sometimes, silence and sheer presence is best
- Don’t underestimate the power of being there for someone - your presence can speak louder than words!
- Job’s friends (**Job 2:11-13**)
  - They ***came to*** Job
  - ***Entered in*** to Job’s grief and suffering
  - ***Gave*** him their ***time***
  - ***Wept*** *with him*
  - *Sat* ***with him*** and didn’t speak a word because they ***saw*** that his suffering was great

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE DO

WHAT COULD BE DONE INSTEAD



UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE DO

Talk more than listen

WHAT COULD BE DONE INSTEAD

Listen more than you talk!

Most people process through talking, so:

- Listen without interrupting, correcting, suggesting, fixing, or judging
- Being a gracious and generous listener is a gift to those who are hurting

On Good Listening

- Give full, undivided attention & concentration, beginning to end
  - silence/put away devices
- Listen actively, not passively
  - Block out distractions (assess the environment)
  - Be alert and listen to their thoughts, emotions, look out for opportunities to serve them
- Be patient
  - Internal: don’t formulate a premature response or reject what they’re saying
- Respond with questions to clarify/understand
- Nonverbal: eye level, uncrossed arms, eye contact

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE DO	WHAT COULD BE DONE INSTEAD
Offer advice	Offer prayer

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE DO	WHAT COULD BE DONE INSTEAD
Focus on the problem	Focus on the person

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE DO

Take rejections (to your attempts to help) personally

Or

Take offense at lack of response

WHAT COULD BE DONE INSTEAD

Practice humility and patience

Extend grace

Put others' needs above your own; offer help without need to be seen or heard

UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE DO

Bring Food

WHAT COULD BE DONE INSTEAD

Food is good, but can still be a burden. Exercise wisdom:

- How many people is it for?
- Are others also bringing food?
- Coordinate/schedule who will bring food on what day
- Use disposable containers to minimize dishwashing / tracking down who to return dishes to
- Provide disposable plates, cups, utensils, toilet paper

Other Things You Can Do

- Be understanding
- Visit them
- Weep with them / Laugh with them
  - Spend time together and do something the person enjoys
- Thank them for sharing this intimate aspect of their life with you
  - Maintain confidentiality
- Write them a card/thoughtful note (or e-mail, text)
  - Regular check-ins
- Think of caring for the caregiver
- Take time to truly know their needs to be able to serve
  - Keep it up as time goes on vs. one-timer

How to Pray for One Another

- We connect what is on a friend's heart with what is on God's heart (i.e. themes and passages in Scripture)
- Move from referring to sheer circumstances to things that are deeper, spiritual, and/or Scripture-based
- Scripture extends and reshapes the original requests
- Prayer for **wisdom** (James 1:5); **unity** (John 17:29-31); **fellowship/encouragement** (1 Thess. 3:10); **love/discernment** (Phil. 1:9-10); **knowledge of God's will** (Col. 1:9); **perseverance** (Col. 1:11); **faith** (Luke 22:32); **fruitfulness** (Col. 1:10); **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23); **armour of God** (Eph. 6:10); **comfort** (2 Cor. 1:3-4)
- Pray & follow up. Pray & follow up. Pray & follow up.

"Our best question will be this: 'How can I pray for you?' Or simply, 'Let's pray *now*.' ... A two-dimensional conversation – between you and another person – goes three-dimensional. We come alongside the sufferer and bring God and the suffering together. We bring light into claustrophobic darkness, where our friend might be alone and without hope. We remind her that God hears. We revisit the promises of God. And we do all this in a way that leads with compassion. That simple call to prayer is crammed with spiritual realities."

– Ed Welch

On Social Media

- Era of instant sharing of our lives, even grief → people may also be more comfortable receiving expressions of care via social media

- Those who feel awkward approaching people about their loss can take advantage of social media to carefully craft their words

- People may post around special dates → acknowledgment from the community soothes some of their hurt

On Social Media

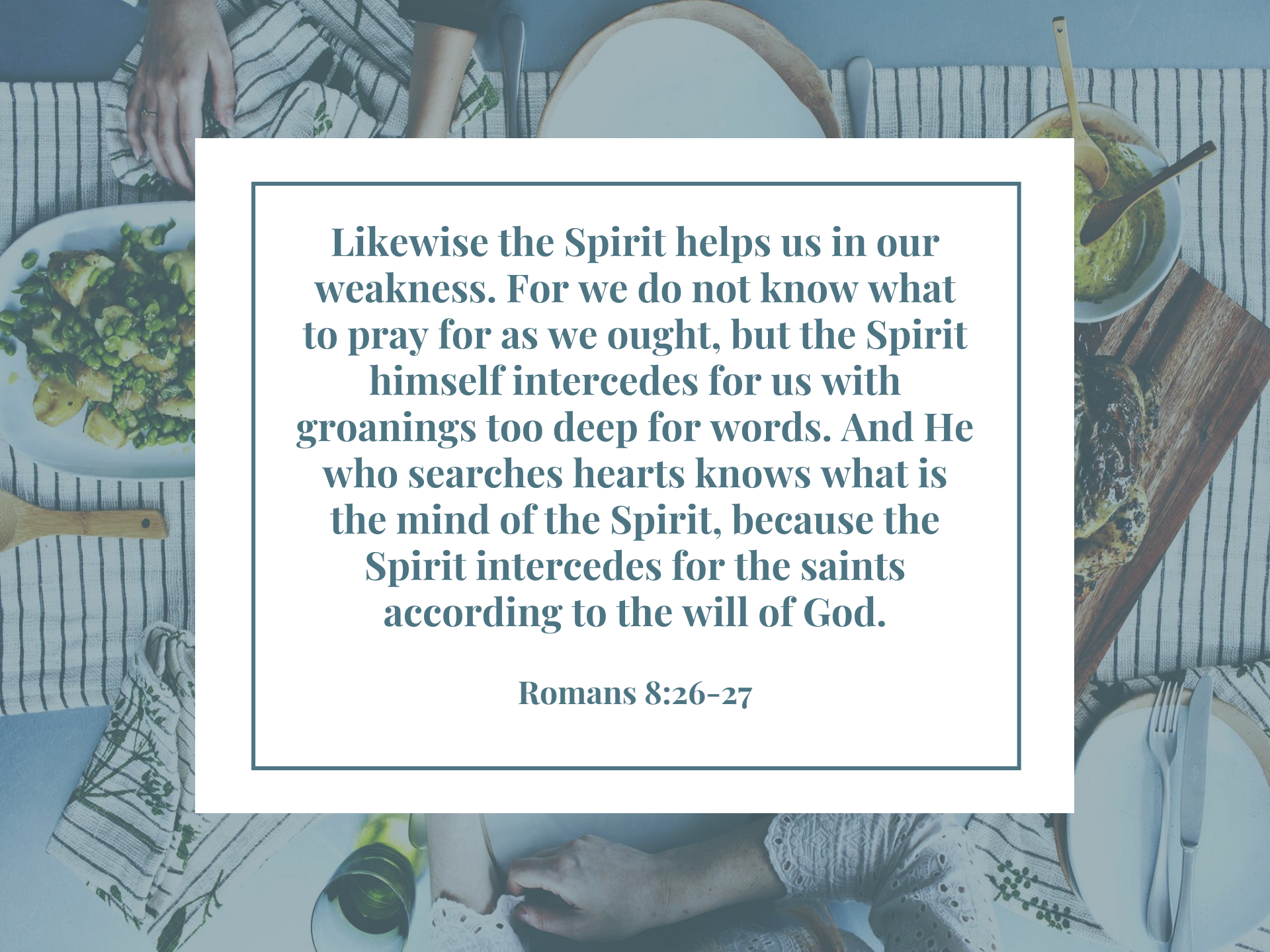
“I remember fondly the simple gift of community with every silent word, thought, picture, tear and prayer that was shared socially. I didn’t feel alone; despite the depth of my emptiness, I never felt alone. Social media has been a tremendous blessing in my grief.”

“Facebook has given me a place to vent and for others to encourage me.”

“When someone ‘likes’ when I share my pain, I take that as a way of them expressing their virtual presence when they are not able to be with me in person.”

Proceed Humbly and Carefully

- Job's comforters were moved by his troubles and seemed to care for him, but they still said things that were wrong and unhelpful (and even *right* and unhelpful)
- No insight presented here is exhaustive or prescriptive
- We walk humbly together before God



Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

Keep *The* Story in View

Eventually...

- After lots of presence, lots of listening
- Share God's life-giving truth in love to give hope in the midst of suffering
- Provide *well-timed* words of encouragement in a *personal* and *devotional* way:
  - Share what God has taught you lately, not just preaching theological truth at them
  - Requires us to be regularly in the Word ourselves
- Continue to remind each other of the Gospel
  - Remind them that their identity is NOT in their circumstances but in their Saviour

The Bible's Master Story

- We remember *the* Gospel Story in order for both the helper and the person being helped to stay oriented
- We should be able to tell and retell the story of Scripture - quickly return to it when life's troubles come our way
- EPHESIANS 1:3-14 → Paul's rich retelling of the gospel
  - the PAST affects the PRESENT and points the way to a FUTURE
- This spiritual reality should be a compass for our conversations

Ephesians 1:3-14

- EPHESIANS 1:4-5 (our past)
  - Does not minimize suffering but reminds us it is against God and His original intent
  - Counterbalances our struggles with a story of love, grace, and belonging
- EPHESIANS 1:7-9 (our present)
  - Redemption and forgiveness of sins removes separation from God – Christ's sacrifice brings our holy God so close to us that He will never leave
- EPHESIANS 1:9-14 (our future)
  - God's master story is the story of hope
  - God's plans are to restore us – and creation itself
  - Everything will be made right

Caring for Non-Christians

- Pray persistently that their trial will draw them to Christ and for their hearts to be receptive to the Gospel
- Continue to walk with them, serve them
- Be open and ready to answer their questions on faith
- When asked, you can share how the Lord is with you in the midst of struggle and the hope you have in Him
- You are a living testimony to them, may the aroma of Christ be made known through your words and actions

PART THREE

Practical Application

Let's Practice Responding!

Break out into small groups of 4-5 people (5 max).

- Each group will receive 3 case scenarios with discussion questions for each.
- 30 minute small group discussion before regrouping for summary/sharing thoughts

Case Scenario 1

Dan, a single Ryerson student, catches up with his friend, Robert, who is married with 3 kids.

“Man, I’ve been so busy and tired lately,” Dan shares, as he begins to describe the various activities, commitments, and school stresses that he has been struggling to manage.

Bob quickly responds, "Oh, just wait until you are married with kids and have real problems. You have no idea how easy you have it right now! One day, you will wish you had these little concerns. I remember back in the day when I was in your situation...you're so lucky, I wish I were single and in school again!”

Case Scenario 2

"I've been battling this cold for so long," Jessica says when asked how she has been doing lately. "I get home from work late every day and I don't feel like cooking for myself – I just don't have the energy. The weather hasn't been helping, with these endlessly cold, dark days...I really haven't been feeling much joy."

Her friend, Marie, listens and pauses a moment to think. "Would you like to come over for dinner sometime next week? I love cooking, and we could have a chill hang-out which we haven't done in a while!"

The following Sunday at church, Marie follows up with Jessica and gives her a bag with some food inside. "How have you been doing the past few days? I've been praying for you! I also cooked a couple simple meals for you this week to help you get through those long days."

Case Scenario 3

It is Sunday morning, and service has just ended. As usual, everyone scatters - parents pick up their children, ushers stay behind to tidy the pews, the worship team disassembles the stage setup, and a crowd of people leave the building altogether, heading to pick up coffee from Tim Hortons. This week, you have to drop off a few items with someone who you are frantically searching for amidst the chaos. On the packed third floor, you bump into a friend and say a quick passing hello. You've been meaning to touch base with this friend for a while, and you want to maximize this opportunity. However, flustered that you only have about 5 minutes left to talk before CE starts, it feels hard to meaningfully engage under those time constraints.

Case Scenario 4

Aaron shares with his friend, Mark, about being unexpectedly let go from his job a month ago. He is extremely discouraged as a result of struggling to find a new position after weeks of effort, and anxious about the financial strain that his unemployment is putting on his family.

As Aaron shares the worries on his heart, Mark suggests, "God is probably trying to teach you not to rely on yourself. Remember Proverbs 3:5-6 and just trust God to provide for you. But also you might want to ask someone to review your cover letter. Have you tried using a recruiter? Have you tried going to a job centre? Where exactly have you been looking online?"

Case Scenario 5

"Are you doing anything for Christmas?" Megan asks her friend, Leah.

"I'm going back to my parent's house for family dinner," Leah sighs.

Megan notices the dread in Leah's voice. "You don't seem too excited about that..."

"I'm not. I don't have the best relationship with my mother. The enemy really uses past hurts to get me down, and there are some things she has done over the years that I just can't forgive. At this point, we barely talk, and it just ruins the time of celebration. Actually, prayers for this holiday season with her would be much appreciated...."

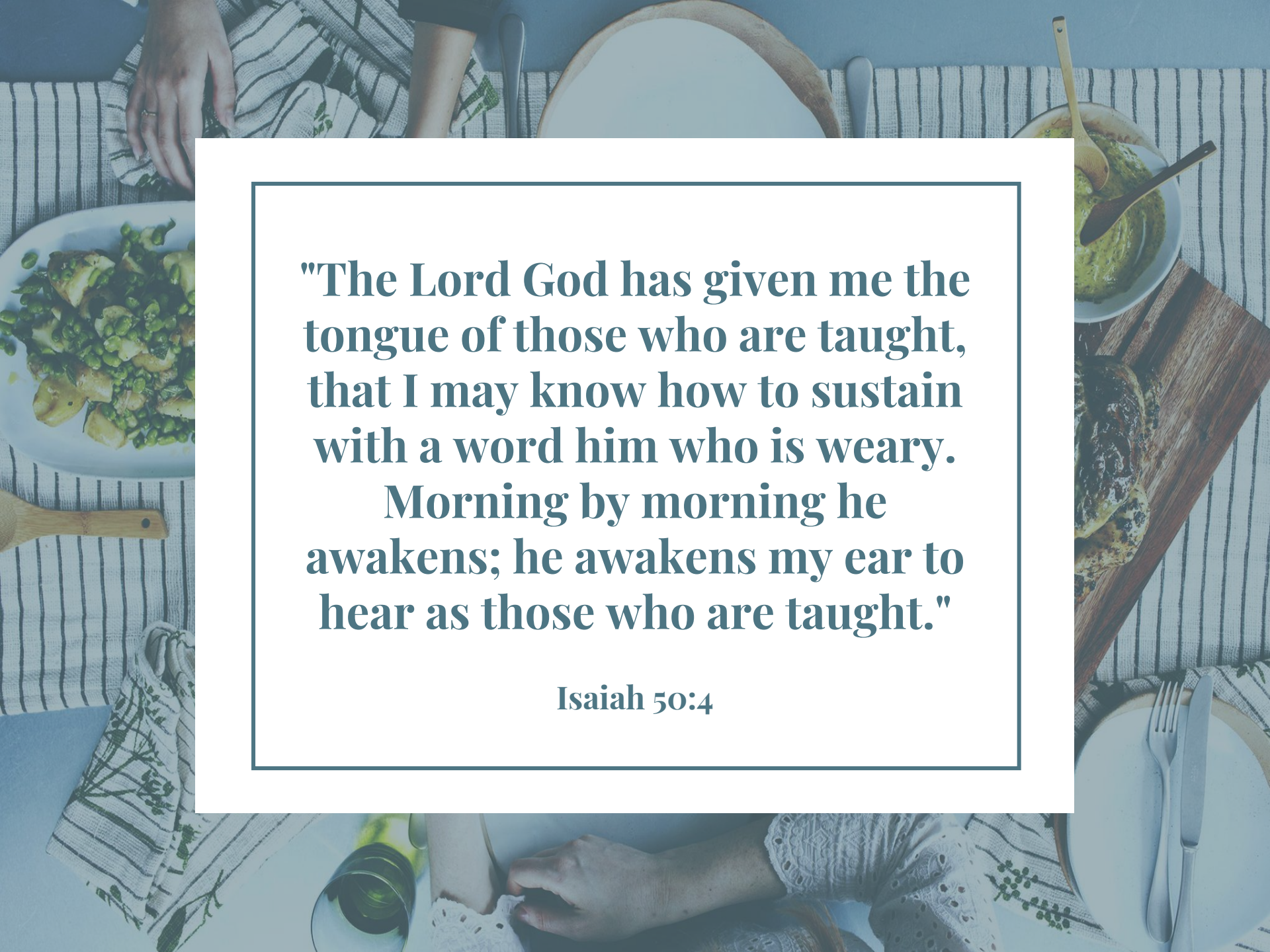
"Of course," Megan responds. "Thank you for sharing this with me! I'm so sorry to hear that family gatherings are difficult for you. Can we pray together right now? Are there any other specific things I can pray for?"

A few days before Christmas, Leah receives a text message from Megan. It reads, "I've been praying for you, that the Lord would give you peace in your heart, the love of Christ, and the hope of reconciliation that He offers as we walk with Him."

Case Scenario 6

Mike and Lisa just had their first child a few months ago, and are busy adjusting to parenthood. They have been fairly absent from church and fellowship life, and have withdrawn from most social gatherings, even with their closest friends. You are a good friend of the couple, and admittedly, you have been extremely busy in your own life lately and haven't had a chance to touch base with them. One day, however, Mike and Lisa come to your mind and you wonder how they are doing.

Conclusion



"The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught."

Isaiah 50:4