



Is it Wise to Witness to Someone who has Lost a Loved one Through Sickness?

By Kurt von Schleicher

Every born again Christian is a witness no matter the circumstances that surround them. In the face of horrible loss regarding their own life or another's life, some Christians would understandably prefer to remain a hidden or secret agent saint. It all might seem way too risky for a valued friendship to try and shine the light of the Lord where there is such intense pain.

"Am I not supposed to have it all together perfectly? Who would want my God if they could see that I also have problems", some saints ask. But when dealing with an unbeliever who is hurting this could be one of the greatest times to listen to how the Lord would have you live and speak for Him (if He leads you to speak that particular day at all). Your friends need you to be honest. You don't have to be perfect and problem-free to serve God.

Real Christians really want to do the right thing, but they often don't feel qualified to deal with unique situations of mourning and sorrow—none of us ever want to make a mistake in a critical hour. Other Christians are seeking to avoid rejection, persecution, mocking, scoffing, and ridicule and opening their mouth might bring it on, but they too are witnesses. Let's face it, Christians at different times of *their walk* are either being a bad witness or a good one, and regardless of what they feel like, people are there to watch them closely and to make their own deductions of what their God is really like ...according to how that Christian might behave or communicate. When people feel broken hearted in deep bereavement, there is a need to fill, and God wants to touch their lives.

It can be convicting to watch a holy victorious saint who is living above the circumstances of life so to speak. But none of us humans are impervious to illnesses, problems and the struggles of life. It is always the right time to be a good witness for Jesus Christ and when He directs you to speak to a hurting unbeliever, that is a great time to open your mouth to comfort them, uplift them with the truth and to simply minister to them in a sensitive clear way.

Of course, we want to be very careful not to give the impression that God was punishing the person they lost for their sins. Some misinformed Christians do this and they give the Gospel a black eye so to speak. Christians who do this type of thing are misrepresenting God's loving character. Who of us can see all the details or the inner hearts of people?—we don't know where they will end up. Instead, we need to speak about the fact that all around us we can see the evidences of a "fallen creation." When people choose to sin, their wrong doing will affect themselves and other people indeed, but we should never affix blame or cause when we don't

have all the facts. We aren't there to be the policeman, the judge or the jury so to speak. We are there to care for them like a spiritual paramedic of sorts.

Here's what we can do: We can simply be there for them to listen to them and to be a friend to them. Oftentimes quietness and no words are so right (read this sentence over again three more times you who always feel led to preach)! Christian clichés and callous quick quips will not be a blessing at all. We read comforting Bible verses if they would like this. We can explain to the bereaved (if they are even asking for information) how in the beginning of creation there was no disease, pain, sickness, suffering, or death. But when sin entered the world via Adam and Eve's bad choice, it brought suffering with it. Then gently turn the conversation away from the person who died to the persons who are still living—theirself and Christ. As the Holy Spirit leads, you might ask them if they have given any thought to the subjects of eternity, God, the Scriptures, Heaven, Hell or if they have kept His Ten Commandments. Then take the opportunity to go show them some verses that deal with these topics. Someone who has lost a loved one often begins to ask soul-searching questions about the Lord, death, and eternity. Do your best to know your Bible in advance because some might be feeling mad at God for making all this bad stuff happen to their friend or loved one, when in reality it was not God's fault. God blessed each one of us with the gift of freewill because a relationship with anyone is not at all meaningful unless one chooses to love in return. He is not needy and didn't make you some cold animatronic-robot to say *"praise the Lord"* just to feed His ego. He never made any one of us to sin and yet we've all blown it and are desperately in need His forgiveness. Many people in the western world are so busy, so distracted or so hardhearted that God in His wisdom might allow some tragedy to touch their sheltered lives to wake them up to reality, in hopes that such a set of circumstances could make them more receptive to starting a relationship with God. He wants us all safe with Him for eternity and so much is at stake down here.

Billy Graham says: *"Our confidence in the future is based firmly on the fact of what God has done for us in Christ. Because Christ is alive we need never despair, no matter what our situation may be. 'Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him... For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'"* (see Rom. 6:8, 23).

Losing a loved one to physical death for anyone can be a very difficult time. The bereaved individual needs some time to heal. They will often feel that their experience with this is totally unique and that no one has ever felt that way or endured such a loss with that kind of suffering before. Of course there are cycles of healing to the pattern of grief which play out a bit differently. They will permit the sorrowing person to recover well in due time if there is a relationship with God and prayer. For some people, however, complete recovery never seems to arrive. Helping or being a witness for Christ around grieving people calls for genuineness, strong faith, special sensitivity, warm-hearted tenderness, sympathy, and empathy. We must depend on the Spirit for his guidance. Convenient, glib, or cavalier pat churchy answers have the ring of brass. Our words must be sincere and meaningful, and "tailor-made for their situation." Real comfort for the bereaving person depends on where he or she actually is in the grieving process, where they are at spiritually, how close they were to the person and what else is going on in their life circumstantially.

Please do not pretend to have an answer for everything. Admit that you do not understand why or how God does what He does.

Please do not be the "cheerleader" type, trying to pump up the bereaved with cheer and good will.

Please do not offer clichés or trite phrases about death and suffering.

Please do not suggest that if the grieving one were more spiritual or closer to God, the pain might be less.

Please remember that one short session together will not meet all the needs of the grieving one. Do what you can to share Jesus Christ and the Message of the Gospel, and then trust God to do His work.

Here's a Strategy that Might Help You

1. Tell the inquirer you care and want to help. Encourage him or her to tell you about the loss and how he or she feels about it. Be a patient listener. It helps to ventilate feelings when one is grieving.
2. Explain that it is healthy to mourn and grieve. This is a universal human experience through which we all must pass. Some have explained that grief is a *"gift from God"*. They say that it may be the Lord's way of helping us humans to react to the tremendous shock of death and its colossal emotional aftermath. Jesus said, ***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"*** (Matt. 5:4). Jesus wants to fill hurting people with the Comforter—the Holy Spirit. Christ feels our pain acutely. He wept with real tears at the grave of Lazarus (see John 11:35).
3. Stress that it is good to express feelings of guilt, anger, confusion, or despair. These feelings should not be repressed by the sorrower or rejected by the helper. Encourage honest talk about feelings.
4. Point out that the things he or she is feeling are often normal to the grieving process and that acceptance and healing will come, though perhaps slowly. God wants to bear our heartaches and losses and give us His comfort, hope, and encouragement. Life may seem valueless at this point, but remember—Christ is permanent, the Solid Rock, the foundation on which to rebuild a life.
5. Ask if he or she has ever received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Remind the bereaved person that, for the Christian, death is not the end of life. Through His death and resurrection, Christ has defeated sin and death, so that to believe in Him now means:

- *We "shall never die" (Jn. 11:25-26).*
- *We have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).*
- *We have a place assured in heaven (Jn. 14:1-b).*
- *We shall take part in the bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51-52).*

And, there will be a glorious reunion some day between us and all those in the Lord whom we hold dear: ***"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus"*** (1 Thess. 4:14).

6. Encourage them to read and study the Bible. It is a great source of comfort and strength.
7. Stress that God sees our earthly life as preparation for the greater joys of heaven (Mk. 8:36). Thus, He permits trials, sufferings, and the death of loved ones to come into our lives so that we might see our need to trust Him: "Yet we believe now that we had this sense of impending disaster so that we might learn to trust, not in ourselves, but in God who can raise the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9 phil).

8. If the bereaved expresses guilt over some aspect of the death of the loved one (this is common in the case of suicides), advise not to second-guess the situation at this point. He or she should not carry guilt for something that should or should not have been done. The death and all that may have preceded it is past, and the bereaved person needs to leave all regrets with the Lord. If he or she has something to confess to God, do so, but then accept the reality of His forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9).

9. If the apparent-seeker seems overwhelmed with a sense of loss, of loneliness, or of uncertainty about the future, suggest confiding in family or friends, trusting them for emotional support and encouragement. Involvement in a sound Bible teaching, Christ-honoring church can do a great deal to fill the areas left void. The saved spiritual pastor who can pray in faith and direct you to appropriate Bible verses may be the one that God wants to use to offer substantial emotional support. Learning to accept God's will for what has happened, having a thankful heart for the years of love shared during the life of the loved one, and for the promise of the eternal life to come—all that is so important! It's also good for us, even though our feelings might oppose this, to get out of ourselves and reaching out in Christian love to help others who are also hurting. Living a life of overt worship of God, tender-hearted witnessing and even ministry to saints will all be great therapy of sorts and will help the bereaved in learning to live fully again.

10. Pray with the hurting person who is open to this. Ask God to give them understanding, comfort, ardor and His healing blessing in their life.

The Death of a Child Can Be Devastating

The death of a child is especially difficult for any one close or for the surviving parents. Death after such a short life span often produces feelings of guilt, melancholy, and a lot of questions. The following may be helpful:

1. Though we cannot know fully why the child died, we do know that children are especially precious to God. Referring to children, Jesus said, ***"Of such is the kingdom of heaven"*** (Matt. 19:14). Interpreted in the light of Scripture as a whole, this passage has led some scholars to believe that children who die are taken immediately into God's presence.

2. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and trust in Him as our Lord and Savior, we have the blessed hope of seeing our loved one again. When King David's child was taken from him in death, he said, ***"Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"*** (2 Sam. 12:23).

Here are Some Edifying Scriptures to Meditate Upon:

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26).

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:1-3).

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;

For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever"(Ps. 23:4-6 nkjv).

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"(2 Cor. 5:1).

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.... For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better"(Phil. 1:21, 23).

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"(Rev. 21:4 nkjv).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the fast time"(1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Contrary to popular belief, Christians are not immune to trials, pain, sickness, disease and sufferings. Here are some verses that will help the Christian who is ill:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"(Jn. 11:25).

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly awaiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body... And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"(Rom. 8:18-23, 28-31, 35, 37).

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"(2 Cor. 4:17).