

When Your Friend Is Suffering

While your heart might be in the right place, it is not unusual to feel uncomfortable or insecure when you're around loved ones who are in the midst of a trial. The temptation to back away can be strong; after all, couldn't they use some space? You don't want to be a burden. Is that ever the right choice though? Is there something both of you can gain from friendship in the midst of suffering?

Bestselling author Kara Tippetts and Jill Lynn Buteyn answer those questions in the new book *Just Show Up: the Dance of Walking Through Suffering Together* (David C Cook). With grace and practical advice, the friends wrote about what relationships look like in the midst of changing life seasons, loads of laundry and even Tippetts' battle with cancer, which she tragically lost on March 22, 2015.

Q. You wrote *Just Show Up* with your late friend Kara Tippetts. Can you tell us about Kara and the circumstances that led you to write this book together?

Kara Tippetts was a grace-filled mother and pastor's wife who was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 36. While fighting cancer, she shared her story with thousands of readers on her blog, Mundane Faithfulness. She also wrote the book *The Hardest Peace* about her journey and co-authored *Just Show Up* with me before passing away at the age of 38.

While Kara was blogging, I was writing fiction. We often talked about collaborating on a book. We settled on the subject of walking through suffering together because we could write from both of our perspectives. I learned a lot from watching Kara's community rally around her, from seeing her friends in action. Of course, as the one suffering, Kara had firsthand knowledge of what works well and what doesn't. We both hoped the book would take some of the mystery out of

showing up for each other and allow people to engage more confidently in community, even during really hard times.

Q: Do you think it's easier to be someone's friend when times are good?

Certainly there's a simplicity to friendship when things are good, but at the same time, when is "good"? We all have hard times, and we're often dealing with tough stuff in different areas of life at the same time. But there's also beauty that comes in doing the really hard stuff together. When I look back on my time with Kara, on the way she let me and so many others in when she was suffering so much, I see a lot of tears, prayers and pain, but I also see grace and even peace. I see really great friendships formed in a short amount of time. It was beautiful to walk with her, even though it hurt so much. It still hurts. But I would choose her all over again.

Q: You write in *Just Show Up* that being there for a friend can be as simple as literally just showing up. Why is presence so important during suffering?

Presence is so important in suffering because sometimes that's really all we have to offer. We don't have the right words, or there isn't anything we can do to help. Sometimes it is just about being there. There's peace and support in being with each other – from both sides. Often it was a comfort for us to be with Kara, even if she was sleeping, and I think she felt that same thing. One time I sat at the hospital with her while she slept. I brought my laptop and just wrote, sitting in the chair. I remember wanting to have something to do so she would feel free to sleep and rest. She opened her eyes and said something about how it gave her comfort that I was there. I could have easily second-guessed offering to sit with her – it wasn't really necessary. But just being present with each other meant something to both of us.

Q: Could you offer some advice for others on how to move past moments of awkwardness?

Pray, then step out in faith. God will meet you there. Be honest. You could even say to a friend, "I want to help. I don't want to be the person who disappears because this is awkward or uncomfortable. How can I be there for you? Will you help me by telling me if I'm doing something offensive or don't have a clue?" I think friendships can grow from this kind of honesty.

Q: Sometimes it's easy to struggle with self-doubt and wonder if your efforts to help will be a nuisance. How did you work through some of those concerns?

I prayed a lot about decisions regarding how to help. I also had a few friends I could hash out my doubts with who were willing to process with me. Sometimes we just need someone to speak truth into our doubts. And at times, I did things and still didn't know after if they were a help. Sometimes it's just about doing. We may never know exactly how our help impacted someone else for the better.

Q: When offering help to someone, why is it important to be very specific about *how* you would like to help them?

It's far easier for people to accept help when we offer something specific. I used to say to people, "Let me know if you need anything." And I meant it. But rarely, if ever, did anyone ask me for anything or admit what might help them. However, when I offer a specific, "Hey, I'm at the store, can I pick anything up for you?" or, "I'd love to come by and do a couple loads of laundry this week. What day works?" it is easier for the suffering people to decide if and when they need that specific help or how they can tweak it to meet their needs.

The other bonus to offering a specific help is that it gives

us the freedom to serve within our gifting. If I'm a kid person, and someone asks me to paint their guest room, that probably won't bring me the same joy as watching kids. We can find so much joy in helping others, and I think part of that is in doing the things we're gifted in – not that we don't ever step beyond that. It's just a good place to start. I love what I learned about being specific in helping others. It was a light-bulb moment for me. It just makes sense, and yet, I'd never really thought about it before. It's important because it makes things easier and more comfortable for both sides and takes away the guess work.

Q: What are some words we can use to offer comfort? Are there any words that can hurt more than help?

I don't think there are perfect words. I guess that's why showing up for others can be confusing and scary. But maybe recognizing this – that there isn't anything perfect to be done or said – will make it easier for people to dive in with each other. Say things that are comforting, listening phrases. "I'm so sorry. That's hard." Comforting is also about what not to say. Don't try to solve your friend. Listen and love them in their hard times.

Q: What do you think holds people back from pursuing deep connections with others even during the good times?

Hurt. We're all a bunch of sinners, and relationships can be scary. We do stupid things and say stupid things, even in good times. I know I have regrets in this area. Plus, relationships are hard work. It's hard to open yourself up to others, to let people in to the not-so-great sides of ourselves.

*For more information about **Jill Lynn Buteyn** and *Just Show Up* at and on Facebook ([JillLynnAuthor](#)), Pinterest ([JillLynnAuthor](#)), Instagram ([JillLynnAuthor](#)) and Twitter ([@JillLynnAuthor](#)).*