

# Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

Vol. 6 No. 4 • December 2006

## Caring for families

**O**ur church is celebrating a family's good news. A young member of our congregation was just declared cancer-free after a full year of chemotherapy and radiation treatments for a rare form of soft tissue cancer. A year ago, we were waiting for a diagnosis and now we are waiting for his hair to grow back. God is good.

Caring for a family in crisis is an important ministry of our churches. Certainly the church itself should have programs in place that can help families,

but this ministry is the responsibility of each member of God's family.

When a family is in crisis, it needs to expand the boundaries of the family to bring in extra support. Extended family members are some-

times present to fill the need. More often than not, the boundary needs to widen to accept members of the church family.

When a family is in crisis, there is more work to do. There is a high level of stress for every member of the family and there are often more needs to be met. In situations such as these, God calls us to show mercy and care for one another. Boaz could have ignored the young woman named Ruth who followed behind

his field workers. He could have left her in harms way or even ordered her out of his field. But, he knew of the crisis in her family and had mercy on her instead.

### Pray for each other.

*James 5:16*

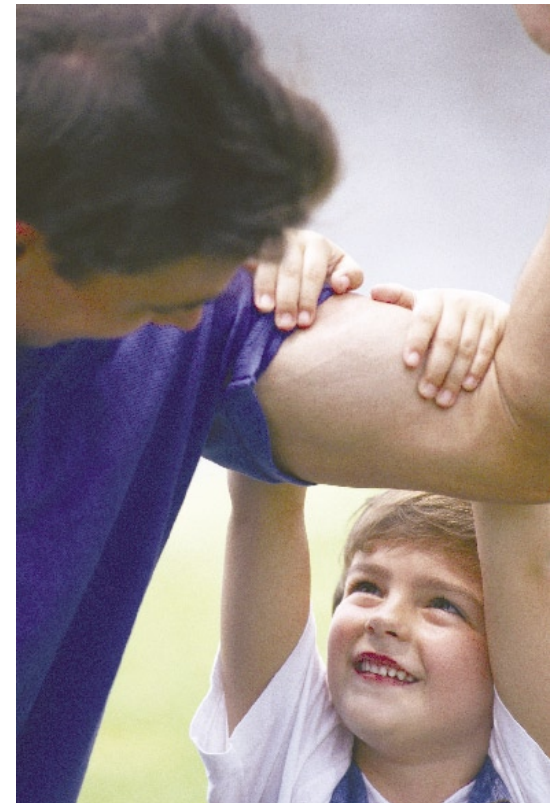
The first and most important way to reach out to a family in need is to pray for them. Pray for them frequently and in specific ways. Pray for them as a family during your devotion time. Not only are you lifting them up to our Father in prayer, but you are also calling attention to their needs for the members of your family. The need for care for the family in crisis will be uppermost in your thoughts.

### Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

*Rom. 12:15*

In order to complete the most important task of prayer, we need to establish a relationship with a family in crisis. When we make a point to check on a family (on a weekly basis), to listen, evaluate, rejoice, and mourn, we will then understand a bit better what they struggle with on a daily basis. When we understand their struggles, we know better how to pray and how to help.

Establishing a relationship with a



family in crisis can pull most of us out of our comfort zone. It is important to remember that your goal is not to solve the family's problems, but to offer comfort and care.

■ Establish regular contact. A weekly phone call is nice, but so is touching base before church or when your paths cross at school events. The key is to do this on a regular basis so the family member understands that your care for them is more than superficial.

■ Be specific with your questions without invading privacy. Instead of asking a general "How are you doing?"

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ask, “What joys or stresses happened this week?” This lets the person decide what he or she wants to share. While not every person is comfortable sharing medical or personal information, it is always appropriate to ask, “How might I pray for you this week?”

■ Be ready to listen. Don’t ask these questions when you are running late for ball practice. Ask when you have the time to listen if the family member wants or needs to share. Don’t pump for information or try to offer solutions. Remember that God is the cure-giver; you are the care-giver. I find the best way to reflect back on communication is to let them know how I will pray.

For instance, when talking with a mother who is afraid her cancer will return, I responded with, “This week I will pray for God to take away your fear.” I am letting her know that her fear is legitimate and debilitating and I cannot fix it—only God can.

■ Evaluate what the family member is saying and look for specific ways the family may need help. Sometimes an outsider can see a simple form of help such as supper brought to the house, or carpool arrangements for children. No act of kindness is too small when a family is in crisis.

■ Remember not to push. If the

family member does not want to share, politely offer comfort and prayer and check later. If a family rejects specific help, again, reassure them that you are praying and check again later. No family member should feel obligated to accept help, but by the same token, a week later there may be a need that can be met. You are serving as a safety net. You want to always be there without being a hindrance.

### **Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**

#### **Gal. 6:2**

A family in crisis is a family that is grieving. If there is a death, they are grieving the loss of a loved one. If there is a chronic or acute illness or injury, they are grieving the loss of health for that family member. Any crisis causes grief, from death to the loss of a job or a home. Even single parents can grieve the loss of a complete family.

Frequently what is most needed is respite. Respite is a rest from the burden of the crisis. Single parents need time alone. Children in families with chronic illness need time away to just be kids. Parents who are grieving need time to feel a little bit of joy and to not feel guilty. Some times inviting a family over to a barbecue or taking the children to the zoo can

mean more to the health of a family than anything else. Knowing what respite is needed comes from prayer and establishing a relationship.

### **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

#### **Matt. 5:7**

Showing support for a family in need is an important part of living our faith. When we help a family that is burdened, we help the whole family of God be stronger and healthier. God cares for us, and He asks us to live our faith by caring for each other. Supporting a family means thinking like that family for a short period of time.

Ask yourself, “If I was a single parent, what would help me?” “If I had a child in a wheelchair that needed constant care, what would give me respite?” “If I was a child who lost a parent to death, what would help fill the whole in my life?” Setting ourselves aside and thinking and acting for God and others is how we practice humility.

When a family is in crisis it is easy to rally around them that first week. Staying with that family for the long haul takes spiritual discipline that only God can grant. God’s mercy for us is enduring. He not only walks with us when we are in crisis, but throughout our lives.

## **For discussion**

1. Identify three families in your congregation who are burdened with a crisis.
2. Pray for the families and for guidance on how to establish a relationship of care and support for these families.
3. How does your church purposefully support families? What else could be done?

### **For further study:**

- The Book of Ruth.
- Aeneas and Dorcus, Acts 9:32-43.
- David and Jonathon, 1 Sam. 18-20 and 2 Sam. 9.

**“Parent Pages” is published by LCMS District and Congregational Services—School Ministry**

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**Vol. 6, No. 4 • December 2006**