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When A Friend Divorces

How to support her through the emotional and spiritual fallout

Judy Corey | posted 5/10/2007

When my friend Amy announced she was getting a divorce, I was shocked. She was a dedicated, patient Christian married to an unbeliever, and though I knew there were problems, I naively thought patience, faith, and love would conquer everything. When she told me Stan had left, I didn't know what to say. If he had died, I would have gone to the funeral, brought food and flowers, and kept her company during the grieving process. Divorce seemed more awkward. I offered my sympathy and encouragement, but kept a "hands off" approach as Amy began sorting out her new single life.

Five years later, when my own marriage dissolved in divorce, I learned the hard way how painful it is when Christian friends don't know how to comfort. Like Amy, I'd masked the chaos in my life and the life of my children behind a calm facade; my Christian friends had no idea of the seriously troubled dynamics of my marriage to an alcoholic. When they learned of the pending divorce I hadn't initiated, a few awkwardly offered words of comfort. Many, however, just avoided me or chirped a cheery, "How are you," then zipped into the sanctuary without waiting for an answer. I often suffered alone; my friends didn't have words to help me.

Amy and I both changed churches following our divorces, but it took Amy nearly ten years to find a new, more loving congregation. Another friend abandoned church nearly twenty years ago after her devastating experience with a congregation that failed to model Christ's love, and she's never returned. Yet it really isn't hard to be a friend to someone who is divorced; all it takes is common sense and compassion. Here are some ways to be a better friend to your friends who are divorced:

Don't be afraid to share her pain and anger. There's *always* pain in divorce, both for the parting spouses and for any children from the marriage. Yet your friend may be afraid to trust you with her pain. When my feelings were raw from rejection, I covered up my fear and inadequacy with busyness. Inwardly, however, I desperately needed emotional support, love, and affirmation. When my Christian friends avoided me, not knowing how to help, I felt even more rejected and unloved.

Through a writers group, God led me to two very special Christian sisters from another church, Nancy and Carma. They listened to my pain and anger as I sorted things out, and refrained from mouthing platitudes such as "Just trust God and everything will be fine." They befriended me, prayed for me, and cheered me on as I went through the grieving process.

Those who had suffered great loss themselves were the biggest help. For example, Amy could comfort me in a way I'd not been able to comfort her, because she understood my situation far better than my still-married friends. Her encouragement, private prayers, and shared experience helped me have hope for the future. When I doubted my own ability to survive the divorce, Amy's quiet determination to live a happy and godly life as a single woman gave me courage.

Help meet her real physical needs. Divorce disrupts not only the emotional and spiritual life of a family, but the financial side, too. Listen to what your friend may *not* be saying. Melissa was divorced and coping with four children. She needed to work, but her car broke down and she lived in a rural county with no public transportation system. Although she didn't ask for help finding a car, her friends recognized her need and helped her connect with a Christian organization that specializes in finding used cars for people in adverse circumstances. Before long, Melissa was driving a van big enough to hold all the children, and she was able to start working again.

One of Melissa's boys was having special difficulty adjusting to his new circumstances. A church friend volunteered to become a "big brother," a male role model who could share his time and interests on occasional weekends. Children of divorce need special attention and acceptance. Mentoring these children may completely change their outlook and help them feel God's love—despite all that's happened.

Maybe your friend has a very simple, practical need you can meet. For example, I hung my clothes in the basement one terrible winter because I couldn't afford to hire a repairman to look at my ailing dryer. As it turned out, when I finally overcame my embarrassment and talked to a church member about it, he told me to check the dryer fuse, something I didn't realize existed. Sure enough, that solved the problem! If you can offer minor handyman repairs or occasional childcare, let your friend know you're willing to do this.

Encourage her toward a deeper faith in God. Christ calls us to heal and to comfort, and our friends who are divorced certainly need that healing. Those who are divorced often feel like failures, and are hurting, angry, lonely people. Whether or not we agree with all their decisions, they need a big dose of unconditional love and hope rather than condemnation. Friends can encourage divorced people to pay attention to what God is telling them through this experience.

You can be the bearer of the good news that God can bring rebirth and joy despite the pain of divorce!

Nancy and Carma lived out the Scriptures, "Carry each other's burdens" ([Gal. 6:2](#)) and "Mourn with those who mourn" ([Rom. 12:15](#)). During my darkest days, I "borrowed" Nancy and Carma's faith when I was too weak to sort out the tangled threads on my own. Nancy encouraged me to spend an hour each morning for prayer and meditation on God's Word. At first I resisted; however, when I finally followed her example, I experienced God's measureless strength and peace.

At Nancy's suggestion, I started journaling about my losses. And studying Bible stories of people like Tamar and Daniel, who had suffered unjustly, also helped put my losses in perspective.

One of the tasks I had to struggle with was facing the fact that the God of my childhood, the father figure who would work miracles to rescue me, was a false image. What Christ called me to do was to follow him in grown-up ways, taking responsibility for my own actions while at the same time admitting my limitations. I had to "grow up" in the Lord, to sort through the painful truths about my shattered marriage. Blaming all the problems on my spouse wasn't allowed; God, and my friends, gently demanded honesty and fairness from me.

So lovingly and gently challenge your friend to grow through this experience. Suggest that your church offer a "Coping with Divorce" class, and invite divorced friends to attend. Model mature faith, and encourage your friend to seek out a solid biblical image of God. If your friend is unchurched, suggest that she find a body of believers who emphasize love and partnership.

Gently nourish your friend's creative side. When so many dreams have died, our God-given spark of creativity often seems buried, too. Time pressures can make creative work seem like a luxury we can ill afford. Yet when we most need a reason to feel alive again, to have new purpose, discovering new artistic or creative abilities can be lifegiving. God may call us, especially in midlife, to develop gifts we've neglected or ignored. Perhaps you can help by offering to babysit once in a while so your friend can explore new hobbies, interests, or talents. Or you might invite your friend to ride with you to a class or meeting, saving money for gas.

Nancy and Carma encouraged me, shy as I was, to begin speaking out of my experience. A gifted public speaker, Nancy soon had me assisting with workshops, calling forth a gift I could not have guessed I possessed. This gave me great confidence and opened new doors in both the sacred and secular world.

You, too, may be able to help your divorced friends see possibilities they might never have envisioned. God is full of surprises!

Include your friend in both worship and play. "Keep close to God's Word, get plenty of sleep, take time to exercise, eat healthy food, and eliminate some of the stress in your life," my friend Jim advised me. Then he added, to my surprise, "Relax and learn to have *fun!*" Jim instructed me to create opportunities for fun and relaxation at least once or twice a week to balance the grief work that was part of my healing process.

My teenaged daughter, Jen, encouraged me to buy a bathing suit, despite my generous figure, and start swimming again. I forced myself to start inviting other single Christian women over to my apartment to watch a video or share supper, or to go out to a party or a church event. Friends invited me to take up cross-country skiing, line dancing, and camping, and every week I learned to schedule some "fun" times.

These activities complemented my regular church attendance, and with my new confidence, I accepted an invitation to co-lead a Christian singles group. Friends invited me to spend an occasional refreshing weekend at a Christian retreat center, and eventually to take classes at seminary. All these activities helped restore my physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Say something to let your friend know you care. You may believe that you have no words to offer a divorced friend. However, even a simple "I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do?" is better than silence, which can be interpreted as rejection. Good friends give hope, strength, and love in a time when these are desperately

needed. Friends encourage divorced people to find the freedom of forgiveness and the ability to dream again.

In this freedom, I'm rebuilding my life. Because of the encouragement and faith of good Christian friends, I grew greatly in my faith and learned how to love again. Now, eight years later, I know God can bring transformation and healing out of the ashes of divorce. You can be the bearer of the good news that God can bring rebirth and joy despite the pain of divorce!

Not long ago, I was driving my car on a particularly foggy morning. Most of the time, I could see the sun like a distant star shining feebly through the haze, but occasionally I drove through low places where the fog completely blocked out the sun. Surrounded by mist, unable to see the next bend in the road, I felt terrified and alone. When finally the fog lifted so I could again see the sun peeking through, I was overjoyed! It was there all along; all I needed to do was trust and keep driving.

As a friend to someone who is divorced, you can encourage them to keep "driving" until the road becomes clear again. You can model light and hope until your friend again can see the sunshine of God's love and grace.

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