

An oil painting depicting two women in conversation. On the left, a woman with blonde hair, seen in profile, wears a blue top and a watch. On the right, a woman with long brown hair wears a pink button-down shirt. They stand on a grassy area with a white church building in the background. The text 'REACHING OUT TO THOSE WHO' is written in red, and 'Mourn' is in a large, dark blue cursive font.

REACHING OUT
TO THOSE WHO

Mourn

BY LARENE HALLING PETERSEN

After the loss of my husband, I learned what it means to comfort those who stand in need.

On April 15, 1981, Russ, my husband of 11 years, was killed in a car accident on his way home from work. I was left with four small children, ages 10, 7, 3, and 2. Looking back on the days and weeks following the accident, I can almost feel the cold numbness inside me that I felt then. I don't remember much about those days, but I do remember the love and compassion I received from others. It made those dark days bearable.

We often include in our prayers a plea for the Lord to "comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (see Mosiah 18:9). But how often do we take the opportunity to be the one who gives the comfort? So many times we feel uncomfortable around someone who is suffering a loss because we don't know what to say or do. I too have arrived at a viewing or funeral wondering what I would say. However, through my own experience I learned about what someone in mourning needs, as well as what others can do to help.

Visitors When I Needed Them

During the days before and after my husband's funeral, I had so many people visit, and I truly felt the love of Christ from those who came. But, inevitably, the day came when visitors had to leave, friends had to return home to their own families, and I was alone. When some of the numbness wore off and reality began to sink in, I realized how alone I was. As I knelt by my bed on one occasion, the tears flowing freely, I cried over and over to my Heavenly Father: "Please send someone to me. I can't be alone tonight."

Five minutes later a sister in my ward, whom I didn't know well, knocked on the door. She said she had been thinking about me and decided to drop by. She stayed for about 30 minutes, and as she was leaving a neighbor came over just to see if I was all right. Before this neighbor left,

more neighbors, a young couple, stopped by and invited my children and me to go with them for ice cream. By the time we got home, I felt I could face the next day.

These charitable people didn't feel the need to bring food or a gift when they visited me. They didn't feel the need to know me well in order to come. Some of my choicest experiences have been these spur-of-the-moment visits, when people knocked on my door unannounced and simply said, "I've been thinking about you and just felt I should come." I don't suppose these people know how much their visits helped, but I do know the Lord sent them in answer to my prayers.

A Helpful Hand Extended

I found that the little things people did for me meant so much: neighborhood fathers who played soccer and baseball with my sons; the neighbor who took all three of my sons on a fathers and sons' outing; the many invitations I received to lunch or to go shopping; offers to stay with my children so I could get away for a while; neighbors who tilled and planted my garden; the handshakes and cheery hellos from ward members at church; and the very special friend who said, "Call me anytime, day or night, and I'll be there." And she was.

Compassionate Communication

Through my experience I also gained insight into the communication between one who mourns and one who gives comfort. As friend after friend came through the line at Russ's viewing, too overcome to speak, all we could do was hug each other—no words were necessary. Others I didn't know as well would simply squeeze my hand or pat my shoulder. If they spoke at all, the simple words "I'm so sorry" were all I needed to know they cared.

Then during the following weeks and even months, I often needed to talk. I found that those who helped the most were those who let me talk instead of talking to me. They didn't tell me to feel a certain way, or to be grateful for the blessings I had. I was grateful for the many blessings I

had received, but I still struggled with many emotions. I felt so much better when someone would say, "I understand that you feel that way, and that's OK." This allowed me to open up and experience my emotions in order to effectively deal with them.

I noticed many people were afraid to mention Russ's name for fear it would remind me of painful things. But because I was already thinking about him most of the time, what a relief it was when people opened the subject and I was free to express my thoughts. The hardest times of all were those when people would avoid talking about Russ, almost acting as though he

THEIR LIVES MANIFEST LOVE



"Those who journey to higher ground love the Lord with all their hearts. . . . They also love Heavenly Father's children, and their lives manifest that love. They care for their brothers and sisters. They nurture, serve, and sustain their spouses and children. In the spirit of love and kindness, they build up those around them. They give freely of their substance to others. They mourn with those that mourn and comfort those that stand in need of comfort."

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Journey to Higher Ground," Ensign, Nov. 2005, 19.

had never existed. It was so much easier when they would mention his name in a natural way and allow me to take it from there if I wished.

Two weeks after Russ died, I told the Lord I would accept Russ's death and asked Him to guide me in what He wanted me to do and be. Though I was by myself at times, I was never really alone. I made steps toward dealing with my husband's death, and Heavenly Father did His part to make sure I had the help I needed when I needed it. I am grateful to those who acted on those words so often used in prayer: "Comfort those who stand in need of comfort." ■

I found that the little things people did for me meant so much, like the neighborhood fathers who played baseball with my sons.

