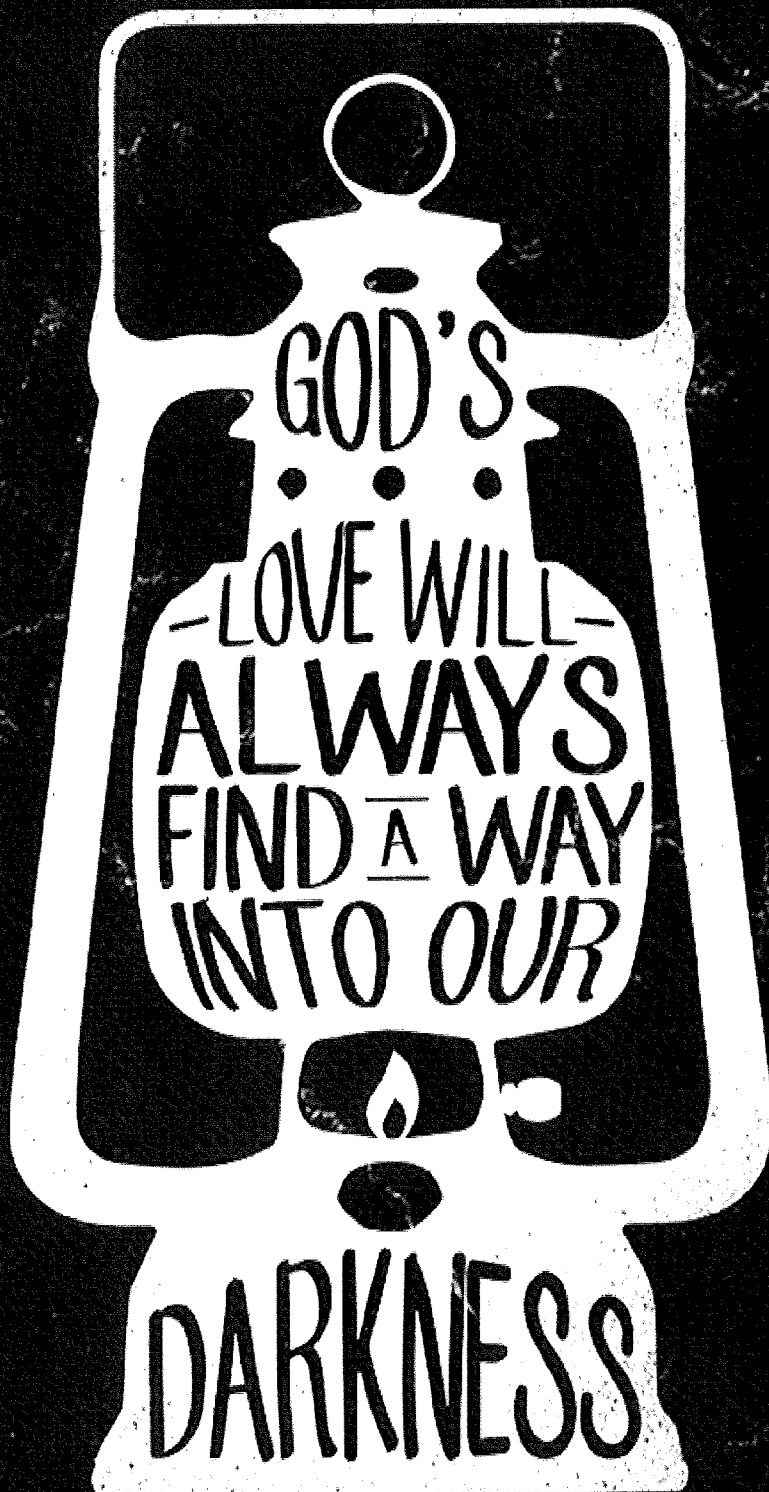


HOW
TO
HELP
HURTING
PEOPLE

MIKE FOSTER

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|-----------------------------------|----|
| ONE WHY PEOPLE HURT | 4 |
| TWO WHY WE HELP | 12 |
| THREE LIES ABOUT HELPING PEOPLE | 15 |
| FOUR THE DON'TS | 20 |
| FIVE THE DOS | 25 |
| RESOURCES | 31 |



GOD'S

LOVE WILL

ALWAYS

FIND A WAY

INTO OUR

DARKNESS

ONE | **WHY PEOPLE HURT**

“What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”

Saint Augustine

THERE ARE VERY few things that still appeal to a mass market. These days it's all about niche and customization. Even the soap we buy has a never-ending list of options. Do you want to smell like “Lumberjack Mountain Breeze” or “Swank-n-Sporty”? We celebrate individuality. Choice. Diversity. Every person is unique. No sets of fingerprints are the same and no human story is exactly identical.

Hurt, however, is one of the few feelings in the world that is truly universal. It touches every life. It arrives in all shapes, sizes, flavors and varieties. It has impacted you and the people you know.

Hurt usually ends up falling into one of two simple categories:

- 1. We have been hurt by another person.** (words, abuse, betrayal)
- 2. We have hurt ourselves.** (mistakes, bad decisions, shame)

Though the topic of pain and loss is a universal theme in all of our lives, we still struggle with knowing what to do, or what to say, or how to respond to

it, especially when it comes to helping others in their struggles.

What do I say to my sister who just miscarried her baby?

What advice should I give to my friend who is struggling with an eating disorder?

Am I responsible for fixing everyone's problems?

How do I help people without shaming them or judging their actions?

Should I send a card, flowers, or cookies, or should I call when tragedy strikes?

It is true that sometimes the most basic questions leave us feeling confused or overwhelmed, and often cause us to not get involved at all in people's problems.

But the need is real. The issue of pain, struggle, and loss is huge. Just consider some of these facts:

- In the last year, suicide has become the second cause of death in teens and young adults.
- 50% of marriages end up in divorce.
- A recent Gallup Poll concluded that 70% of Americans hate their jobs.
- Last year, the number of people diagnosed with depression increased by 20%.

You may be thinking right now, "Wow, this eBook is off to a cheery start." Hold on, we're about to get to the good part.

The good news is you and I can do something to help. Hurt has an antidote. It's you and I.

That's right. You can be a part of the mass-market solution. Each of us has the capacity to help anyone who is experiencing pain, loneliness, regret, grief, shame, or suffering. And the good news is you don't have to be an expert or a highly trained professional. In fact, this eBook is designed to give you all the basics that you need. You will discover that all you need is your own not-so-perfect story, have a passion for people who are struggling, and the willingness to try.

People of the Second Chance

This brings us to why I started People of The Second Chance. Essentially, we're an organization made up of not-so-perfect people rescuing other not-so-perfect-people from their hurts and hang-ups. ***We serve up grace like hotcakes and pour out second chances like maple syrup.*** Our biceps aren't big but our hugs are awesome. We lead with grace and do our best to amplify hope in people's stories. We do this by creating awesome tools for hurting people and equipping rescuers to go out and help others.

Along the way I've learned a couple of things about how to help people more effectively. The reality is I've said and done a lot of stupid things when helping hurting people. I've made a lot of bonehead mistakes thinking that I was doing the "right" thing. But along this journey I've also done a few things that have worked surprisingly well. I've listened and taken great notes, and I want share some of that stuff with you now.

The “Me Too” Miracle

All the conversations I have had with people about their hurt carry a common thread. When people have gone through pain, abuse, or life crisis, they often start believing three deadly lies about themselves. Whenever we start trusting these lies, they inevitably suck the hope and happiness out of life. The three deadly lies are:

1. I will never be good enough.
2. I am defined by my shame, hurt, embarrassment, or past.
3. It will always be this way no matter what I do.

Together we can defeat these lies with the truth... the key word being “together.”

Hurt festers in isolation, but the second it meets community it begins to evaporate, making room for recovery. This is the reason you can't simply download an AA program like you downloaded this eBook. If you're struggling with sobriety you must attend an AA meeting with other people, people who can look you in the eye and say “me too.”

“Me too” is like a downpour in a desert. And since we have all experienced hurt at some point in our lives, we're called to be rainmakers, showering even the driest of lands.

Bottom line: We need each other...especially when we're hurting.

On the opposite end of that spectrum is loneliness and isolation. The

solution to loneliness and feeling powerless over our hurt is to live our lives in authentic and courageous connection. When we bravely share our stories and have honest conversations about our struggle we find that we are not alone. Or weird. Or the “only one.” ***Community breaks us free from our helplessness.***

Helplessness is Learned

Of the three lies, the lie that “it will always be this way” is the most destructive and hardest to reverse. It is the malignant bi-product of persistent hurt. When you’re helping people it is a good idea to be on the alert for this lie. I promise you it will often show up when people share about their pain.

Martin Seligman, a researcher in the 1970s, once conducted a study on behaviorism in animals, where dogs learned to associate a tone with a very mild shock. In this study, dogs were restrained in a harness and exposed first to a sound, which was then followed by the shock. The hypothesis was that the dogs would learn to escape once they heard the sound, knowing that the shock was coming.

What happened next was unexpected to say the least. Seligman placed an unrestrained dog in a box that he could easily escape from to avoid the shock. But upon hearing the tone, the dog simply lay down and began to whine instead of jumping out the box. Even when the shock came the dog did nothing to evade it. In fact, a full two-thirds of the dogs didn’t even try to escape the negative stimulus. Seligman determined that the dogs had,

in fact, learned to be helpless. In the early conditioning, the dogs had come to believe that no matter how loudly they barked or struggled or jumped it just did not matter...nothing they did helped, so why even try to escape?

And that's where you and I come in. You and I can help hurting people see life differently and amplify hope in hopeless situations. We can help point out that if you can walk, you can dance and if you can talk, you can sing. We can challenge the lies that they believe and direct them to real freedom.

YOU CAN'T
SAVE PEOPLE
YOU CAN ONLY
LOVE THEM

LET'S FACE IT. There are a lot of things wrong with the world today. Some days seem so bleak you may want to just give up. The news should have a new slogan: "Watch us and be depressed in 10 minutes or fewer." It's one great, giant mess out there.

So why is it important to help? Why should you get involved in people's problems and walk with them during their tough times?

You should help because you are needed and you've got something wonderful to give. It really is that simple. Not to mention the terrific difference you will make and how awesome it feels to make that kind of difference in the world.

Every one of us wants a purpose. Every human being asks, "Why am I here?" "Why do I exist?" Well, I believe that we are rescued to become rescuers. I believe that you and I play a role in the redemption of the world and God's plan of making all things new.

In the next few sections I would like to get really practical in how we should help people. If you're ready, let's dive in.



* I'VE *

BEEN

RESCUED

* TO *

BECOME

* A *

RESCUER

THREE | **LIES ABOUT HELPING PEOPLE**

“Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we’re all in this together.”

Brené Brown

SOMETIMES HELPING PEOPLE take the smallest step in the right direction could be the biggest step they ever take. But too often, we are confused about what it means to help others. This confusion often makes us feel apprehensive, paralyzed, or ineffective.

“What if I mess this up? What if they misunderstand me? What if they question my motives, and make a big deal on Facebook about how I made their situation even worse? What if I look stupid or say the wrong thing?”

Let’s debunk a few of the biggest lies I’ve seen out there in the field.

LIE #1: You are responsible for 100% of the healing process.

Nope. You simply play a part in the healing process. We often fear the risk of getting involved in someone else’s problems because we feel that those problems are too complex and therefore out of our expertise. And you know what? You’re absolutely right. Healing is done in community and you have something unique to offer. You can only give where you can and

let others give where they can. Healing is always done in community, not by one individual. You're not required to take on another full-time job as rescuer; you just need to be part of the team.

LIE #2: I should be the expert on how to solve this person's problem.

False. Saying "I don't know" is completely ok. Even professional counselors would consider their role to be more of a facilitator for people to process their emotions than an instruction manual. This should be a huge weight off your shoulders. Your pedigree doesn't dictate your ability to be a sounding board for someone who is hurting. Don't play the expert; be a friend. And remember, your first role isn't to "save" people, but to love people.

LIE #3: Things get fixed fast.

The reality is that there is no timetable. Ask the average person how long it usually takes to recover from a typical setback. I bet most would say it takes around 3 months. Some might say a couple weeks. The fact is that working through hurt ALWAYS takes longer than we think. There are no quick fixes. However, we live in a culture where everything is instant. You can't microwave grief like you can a pop tart and you can't heal in the time it takes to snap a photo on Instagram. Healing is like film. It takes a long time to develop before it comes out of the dark. ***In our digital world, Hope is analog. It always takes longer to heal than anyone could have predicted.***

LIE #4: I won't know what to say to people.

The good news is you don't have to say much. In fact, the greatest gift we can give people is to ask questions, listen empathetically, and simply let them process. Don't underestimate how helpful it is to simply provide a space for others to talk things out. Asking simple questions to an individual often helps clarify things more than giving answers or opinions. A great question to ask someone struggling with a problem is this: "Imagine if I were in your position right now; how would you coach me? What would you say to me?" These types of questions allow the person to problem-solve on his/her own. It allows the person to step out of the pain for a moment and give good counsel to his/her "imaginary self."

The next time you're feeling gun-shy about helping someone who is hurting, filter your emotions through these four lies and their corresponding truths. See if you come out the other side braver and less stressed about your ability to be a significant part in someone's rescue story. We'll be out there alongside you cheering you on.

THE
SUFFERING
YOU SEE

THE
SUFFERING
YOU DON'T
SEE

FOUR | **THE DON'TS**

“Love is taking a few steps back, maybe even more.”

Winnie the Pooh

DON'T SAY: "At least..."

If someone has just experienced loss or is dealing with a tragedy, the last thing you want to say is "at least you still have..." For example, if your friend just had a miscarriage, it's not helpful to say, "Well, at least you have other children." It's important that we never minimize anyone's problems. This statement can actually make the situation worse. Not only that, it makes you look incredibly insensitive. Bottom line: Don't ever use that phrase if you want to be a rock-star rescuer.

DON'T EVER SAY: "Why did you...?"

This statement puts blame, responsibility, and additional shame on the hurting person. For example, if your friend just told you her teenage daughter got caught with drugs, don't respond with, "Why did you let her go to that party?" Or when your friend's car gets stolen don't say, "Why did you leave the door unlocked?" Our natural tendency is to be curious about the details but asking "why" questions in the middle of someone's suffering usually isn't helpful.

AVOID SAYING: "Don't cry."

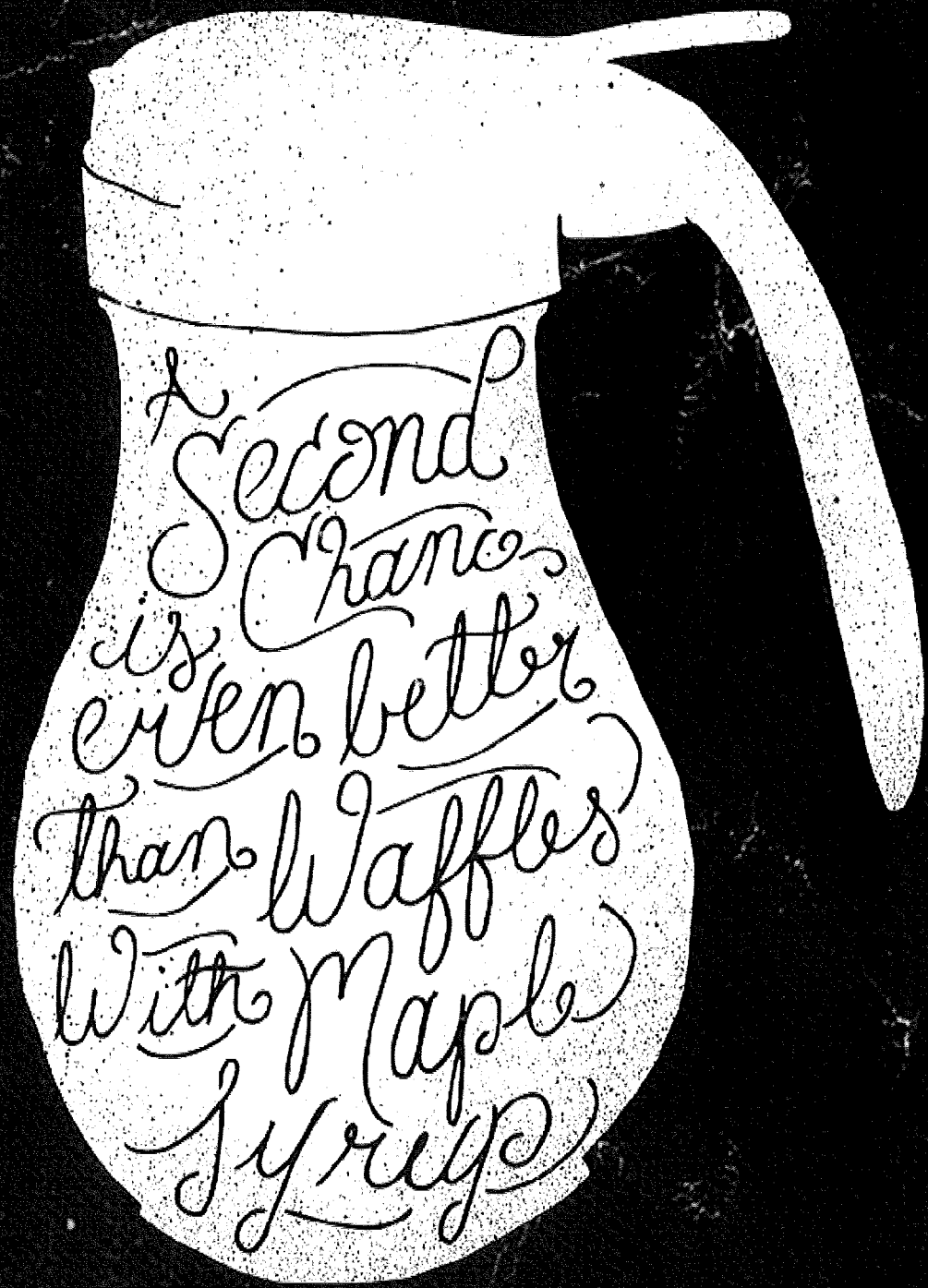
Tears are a natural physiological release of psychological symptoms. We need to let others express their emotions and deal with grief the way the body intends. Trying to control someone's grieving process will never be effective. Usually we say "don't cry" because we feel uncomfortable and

want to do something to alleviate the tension of the situation. In this case, the best something to do is nothing. Simply remaining silent and letting the body do what it needs is often the best response. Often we say, “Don’t cry” because raw and unfiltered emotions make us personally uncomfortable. ***Just remember it is about the hurting person in that moment, not you.***

DON'T SAY: “God has a plan.”

This might be the most over-used cliché that we default to when trying to help. Try to avoid using this statement if you can. When people are dealing with serious grief or pain, this is not the time to start problem-solving the future for them. Fight the tendency to try to comfort the person by putting a silver lining on the situation or trying to move quickly to the future. A statement like, “I don’t even know what to say right now but I’m so glad you told me” is much better than trying to fix the problem. Allow people to grieve. Resist the urge to get to the happy ending by using religious clichés.

Hopefully you’re beginning to see a pattern here. The key to becoming a good rescuer is less about what you can add and more about what you can subtract. Simplicity. Brevity. Silence. These are the brushes of a master rescue artist, an expert in the style of minimalism.



A Second
Chance
is even better
than Waffles
With Maple
Syrup

FIVE | **THE DOS**

“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.”

Ernest Hemingway

NOW HERE COMES the fun part. In a world where people feel trapped by all the lies and the don'ts out there, we want to make sure we also share with you things that you're free to **do** when interacting with those who are hurting. Here are four "dos" you have permission to activate on this very minute:

CHILL OUT.

I love what author and leadership guru, Seth Godin, writes about anxiety: "I define non-clinical anxiety as, 'experiencing failure in advance... enacting a future that hasn't happened yet, and amplifying the worst possible outcomes...'" In other words, anxiety is investing in the future you don't want. ***You need to help diffuse despair, not increase drama.*** Don't get worked up. Don't add to the stress or the strain. When people are in chaos everything is magnified, heightened, and intensified. Don't get caught up in the storm. Keep it cool, calm, and collected. Watch your own emotions and make sure they are balanced and loving.

PRACTICE COMPASSIONATE CURIOSITY.

Listen to understand, not just reply. Asking compassionate questions and letting people process is healthy for the hurting heart. “Tell me about what you’re feeling right now,” or “How can I help you during this difficult season?” are wonderful questions.

GIVE EMPATHY.

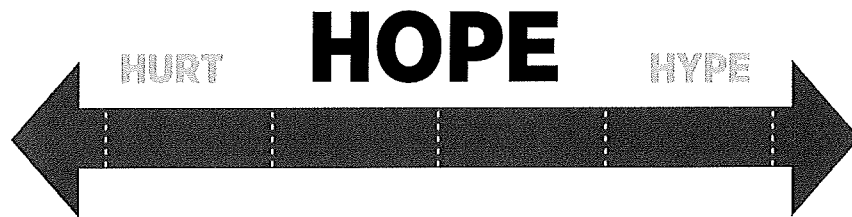
Psychologist, Theresa Wiseman, defines empathy as the ability to embody 4 qualities: (1) Recognize someone else’s perspective; (2) Stay out of judgment; (3) Recognize emotion in other people; (4) Communicate that emotion.² Empathy requires us to connect with our own pain to recognize someone else’s. It’s an art and one worth practicing often. Empathy is about a heart connection. Let your heart connect with those who are suffering. A friend of mine once said, “Sometimes people need to be felt even more than they need to be heard.” Empathy helps us feel each other.

CHOOSE HOPE. NOT HYPE.

It’s easy to live on two ends of what we call the hurt/hype continuum. Some people camp out in the land of Hurt repeating phrases like, “Life sucks,” “It’ll never get better,” and “What’s the point?” On the opposite end of the continuum is the land of Hype, another place you’ll find people hanging out carelessly throwing around phrases like, “God’s gonna take care of it!”

² THERESA WISEMAN, “A CONCEPT ANALYSIS OF EMPATHY,” JOURNAL OF ADVANCED NURSING, 23 (1996): 1162-1167.

“It’s all good,” and “Hakuna matata.” Neither end accurately reflects people’s reality. It’s best to help people avoid both ends of this continuum (and avoid it yourself) by focusing on hope—the acknowledgement that while today is in fact flawed, it’s not the end of the story.



HOW TO WIN A CARING CONTEST

“The world is unprincipled. It’s dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn’t fight fair. But we don’t live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren’t for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.”

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 MSG

Author and lecturer, Leo Buscaglia, once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The goal of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old whose next-door neighbor happened to be an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

Each of us carries the scope within us to help rescue others regardless of whether we're 4 or 94. And after years of doing this sometimes all people really need is to "help them cry." You see, that 4-year-old understood probably the most important concept when helping people. When in doubt, do simple things.

So congratulations! You're now a trained, got-what-it-takes rescuer! Use these tips and basic insights to guide your rescue efforts. The hurting world awaits.