**How to (and how NOT to) Minister to Families Battling Cancer**

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Reflecting on our past and present experience with cancer, we have been blessed to have family, friends and a church family who have been wonderfully supportive. Quite often, people want to know how they can help and encourage someone going through the experience of cancer or other medical related trials. I hope that you will find this list useful as you minister to others. Here are a few things I found to be helpful and not so helpful in our journey:

**Helpful:** Encouraging me to trust God through our trial

**More Helpful:** Sharing your experience of God’s grace in your time of need and the assurance that God will be with me as well

**Not Helpful:** Telling me about all the people you know who also have/had cancer

**Definitely Avoid:** Telling me about the people you know who died from cancer

**Helpful:** Assuring me that our doctor/hospital is a good one

**More Helpful:** Sharing things you found helpful during your own experience with cancer

**Not Helpful:** Telling me all the problems you had with my doctor or hospital

**Definitely Avoid:** Giving me unsolicited medical advice about alternative doctors, hospitals, or treatments

**Helpful:** Letting me know that you are praying for me (and telling me this more than once)

**More Helpful:** Taking time to pray WITH me

**Not Helpful:** Avoiding sharing your own prayer needs so that I can be praying for you

**Definitely Avoid:** When I ask you to pray, telling me about someone I don’t know whose problems are “worse” than mine

**Helpful:** Sharing scriptures about the Lord’s goodness and putting trust in Him

**More Helpful:** Sharing a passage of Scripture that was particularly meaningful to you when you were facing a similar trial

**Not Helpful:** Quoting Romans 8:28

**Definitely Avoid:** Trite (unbiblical) statements like “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle”

**Helpful:** Noticing I am discouraged and giving me a hug

**More Helpful:** Being there with me during the times I feel alone

**Not Helpful:** Not being patient with me as I struggle with my feelings and emotions

**Definitely Avoid:** Criticizing my emotional reaction or labeling my pain and grief as a lack of faith

**Helpful:** Offering a shoulder if I need one

**More Helpful:** Taking me to coffee or lunch and then letting me share my feelings out loud

**Not Helpful:** Telling me you know how I feel or how you would feel if you were me

**Definitely Avoid:** Telling me how I *should*feel

**Helpful:** Asking how we are doing or how certain things went

**More Helpful:** Letting me know you were thinking about/praying for us during a procedure, test, meeting, or particularly hard day

**Not Helpful:** Pestering me for details about things I’d like to keep private for now

**Definitely Avoid:** Taking it personally if I don’t share all the information you want to know

**Helpful:** Offering a specific kind of help that you can provide and you think would be helpful

**More Helpful:** Offering to help at a specific time or day when we will need it (like days we go to the doctor or hospital)

**Not Helpful:** A general “anything you need” offer

**Definitely Avoid:** Being upset if we don’t need your help or insisting to help with things we really don’t need

**Helpful:** Offering to keep my children or help with transportation if needed

**More Helpful:** Taking my kids with your kids to do something fun

**Not Helpful:** Treating my children’s concerns and feelings as trivial or unimportant

**Definitely Avoid:** Criticizing my kids (or my parenting)

**Helpful:** Emails, texts, guestbook entries on our online journal, or comments on my Facebook page

**More Helpful:** Cards, personal notes, (short) phone calls

**Not Helpful:** Posting links about cancer on my FB page

**Definitely Avoid:** Posting personal information I shared in confidence on your prayer list or social networking site without my permission

**Helpful:** Expressions of care and concern

**More Helpful:** Acts of care and concern

**Not Helpful:** Saying something stupid

**Definitely Avoid:** Avoiding me altogether because you don’t know what to say (or are afraid of saying something stupid)