

How Can I Help?

by Perry A~

1 Peter 4:10-11

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

As Christians we are called upon to be servants of God. We each have multiple gifts and talents that can be used in multiple ways to serve others. You don't have to have money to share your gifts with others. Whatever you do, do it with great joy and you will be reflecting God's Joy. We have all seen athletics make great plays and bow their heads in gratitude of their abilities and give the glory to God. I for one am touched that they openly show their gratitude and praise God openly. They may not be missionaries but are they not serving in their own way?

Not a day goes by without our being called upon to help one another--at home, at work, on the street, on the phone. . . . We do what we can. Yet so much comes up to complicate this natural response: "Will I have what it takes?" "How much is enough?" "How can I deal with suffering?" "And what really helps, anyway?"

In his book **How Can I Help?**, author Ram Dass explores a path through these confusions questions dealing with how can we help, and provides support and inspiration for us in our efforts as members of the helping professions, as volunteers, as community activists, or simply as friends and family trying to meet each other's needs. Here too are deeply moving personal accounts: A housewife brings zoo animals to lift the spirits of nursing home residents; a nun tends the wounded on the first night of the Nicaraguan revolution; a police officer talks a desperate father out of leaping from a roof with his child; a nurse allows an infant to spend its last moments of life in her arms rather than on a hospital machine. From many such stories and the authors' reflections, we can find strength, clarity, and wisdom for those times when we are called on to care for one another. **How Can I Help?** reminds us just how much we have to give and how doing so can lead to some of the most joyous moments of our lives.

At times, helping happens simply in the way of things. It's not something we really think about, merely the instinctive response of an open heart. Caring is a reflex. Someone slips, your arm goes out. A car is in a ditch, you join the others and push. A colleague at work has the blues, you let her know you care. It all seems natural and appropriate. You live, you help.

When we join together in this spirit, action comes more effortlessly, and everybody ends up nourished. Girding against the flood ... setting up a community meeting ... preparing a funeral ... people seem to know their part. We sense what's called for, or if we don't, and feel momentarily awkward, someone comes quickly with an idea, and it's just right, and we're grateful.

We take pleasure not only in what we did but in the way we did it. On the one hand, the effort was so natural it might seem pointless or self-conscious to make something of it. It was what it was. Yet if we stop to consider why it all felt so good, we sense that some deeper process was

at work. Expressing our innate generosity, we experienced our “kin”-ship, our “kind”-ness. It was “Us.” In service, we taste unity.

The swimmer story:

I was in about forty feet of water, alone. I knew I should not have gone alone, but I was very competent and just took a chance. There was not much current, and the water was so warm and clear and enticing. But when I got a cramp, I realized at once how foolish I was. I was not very alarmed, but was completely doubled up with stomach cramps. I tried to remove my weight belt, but I was so doubled up I could not get to the catch. I was sinking and began to feel more frightened, unable to move. I could see my watch and knew that there was only a little more time on the tank before I would be finished with breathing! I tried to massage my abdomen. I wasn't wearing a wet suit, but couldn't straighten out and couldn't get to the cramped muscles with my hands.

I thought, “I can't go like this! I have things to do!” I just couldn't die anonymously this way, with no one to even know what happened to me. I called out in my mind, “Somebody, something, help me!”

I was not prepared for what happened. Suddenly I felt a prodding from behind me under the armpit. I thought, “Oh no, sharks!” I felt real terror and despair. But my arm was being lifted forcibly. Around into my field of vision came an eye—the most marvelous eye I could ever imagine. I swear it was smiling. It was the eye of a big dolphin. Looking into that eye, I knew I was safe.

It moved farther forward, nudging under, and hooked its dorsal fin under my armpit with my arm over its back. I relaxed, hugging it, flooded with relief. I felt that the animal was conveying security to me, that it was healing me as well as lifting me toward the surface. My stomach cramp went away as we ascended, and I relaxed with security, but I felt very strongly that it healed me too.

At the surface, it drew me all the way in to shore. It took me into water so shallow that I began to be concerned for it, that it would be beached, and I pushed it back a little deeper, where it waited, watching me, I guess to see if I was all right.

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It felt like another lifetime. When I took off the weight belt and oxygen, I just took everything off and went naked back into the ocean to the dolphin. I felt so light and free and alive, and just wanted to play in the sun and the water, in all that freedom. The dolphin took me back out and played around in the water with me. I noticed that there were a lot of dolphins there, farther out.

After a while it brought me back to shore. I was very tired then, almost collapsing, and he made sure I was safe in the shallowest water. Then he turned sideways with one eye looking into mine. We stayed that way for what seemed like a very long time, timeless I guess, in a trance almost, with personal thoughts of the past going through my mind.

Then he made just one sound and went out to join the others, and all of them left.

The answer to a call for help is always answered and directed by God. He is the orchestrator bringing elements in the universe to do his bidding. Never doubt that.

That reminds me of a Cajun Story:

The Hand of God

This story happened in a little town in Louisiana, and while it sounds like an Alfred Hitchcock tale, it's real.

This guy was on the side of the road hitch hiking on a very dark night in the middle of a storm. The night passed slowly and no cars went by.

The storm was so strong he could hardly see a few feet ahead of him. Suddenly he saw a car slowly looming, ghostlike, out of the gloom. It slowly crept toward him and stopped. Reflexively, the guy got into the car and closed the door, then realized that there was nobody behind the wheel.

The car slowly started moving again. The guy was terrified, too scared to think of jumping out and running. The guy saw that the car was slowly approaching a sharp curve. The guy started to pray, begging for his life; he was sure the ghost car would go off the road and he would plunge to his death, when just before the curve, a hand appeared through the window and turned the steering wheel, guiding the car safely around the bend.

Paralyzed with terror, the guy watched the hand reappear every time they reached a curve. Finally, the guy gathered his wits and leaped from the car and ran to the nearest town.

Wet and in shock, he went into a bar and voice quavering, ordered two shots of tequila, and told everybody about his horrible, supernatural experience. A silence enveloped everybody when they realized the guy was apparently sane and not drunk.

About half an hour later two Cajuns walked into the same bar. One says to the other, "Look Boudreaux, there's dat idiot what rode in our car when we was pushin it in the rain."

Another story of how God has our backs in these moments.

The state had just released many people from its mental institutions with very little preparation. Our halfway house was about to be flooded with applicants. We had only so much room. Who to shelter? Who to clothe? Who to feed? Deep questions to be faced very suddenly.

An hour before we opened, we agreed to sit together in silence. Meditation, prayer, just plain calming down ... everyone went for their ammo. Then we opened the doors, somehow trusting.

Everything we did, we agreed to do with love. Those people we accepted, we accepted with love. Those we turned away or helped find alternatives ... love. Everyone seemed to understand. The differences between us all, staff and applicants alike, seemed less solid. The whole idea that it all had to do with mental illness even seemed a little artificial. Nobody was really thinking that much, or had time to, or needed to, or something. So much of it was just coming from the heart. So many people, with so many problems. But it went so smoothly. How? Because we were unified and calming and addressed all issues with love thus love prevailed.

There is also a chapter in the book on burnout. When listening to problems we can be drawn into their suffering dragging you down and ending in burn out. Ram Dass suggests to become an observer with love and recognize we all have a journey and God has them in His hands.

We need to become less concerned about whether or not we are doing it correctly, and more concerned about whether or not we are loving. What have you done this week, out of pure love

with no expectations of returns for someone today? It is the glue that holds relationships together. When you are loving, it is a gift and will be returned in many ways.

Closing Prayer: Father, God, Lead guide and direct us in ways we can share our many talents and gifts with other in Service to God. May the goodness of our gifts bring joy to others lifting them in their times of need. May we recognize the many ways the gifts are returned to us 10 fold. May these times of service bind us together so we experience that it is in giving that we truly receive, knowing at some time in our lives we are all on the giving and the receiving end of God's goodness. In Christ name we serve. Amen