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6 SIMPLE STEPS TO OFFER THE HELP SOMEONE REALLY NEEDS

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Carry each other's burdens ...

- Galatians 6:2

Do you know someone who needs a little extra help right now? Perhaps a mom or baby needs to be in the hospital for a while, or someone in your community needs help caring for their family while a parent recovers from surgery.

You want to help, but your first thought might be: “How can we help? I don’t know where to begin. Plus, do we even have the time to help this family?”

Never fear ... help is on the way! Use these 6 simple steps to provide help in a way that’s *actually* helpful to the family and really do-able for you.

Step 1: What does this person need help with the most?

The first step is to find out what this person needs help with the most. But before you offer to help, it’s important to get in the right frame of mind. Put yourself in her position and remember how vulnerable you felt the last time you needed to ask for help. Our culture is steeped in “I need to do this myself,” but in reality we all benefit when we both offer and receive help.

Tell the person that you want to help her and ask if you can quickly chat to create a list of specific needs. Remember to be gentle, yet lovingly persistent. If she’s open to receiving help, here are some ideas to get you started. But everyone’s list should be unique because every family has different needs and priorities.

- Caring for young kids at home
- Bringing kids to school and picking them up
- Cooking the family’s meals
- Shopping for groceries
- Cleaning the house
- Walking/caring for pets
- Mowing the lawn

Do your best to rank them A, B or C (A’s are a must, B’s are important, and C’s are optional). It’s valuable to keep the C’s on the list because you may find someone who wants to help, but only by doing something on your C list.

Step 2: Who can help?

Now, it's time to build a list of anyone who may want to help this person and get an email for each possible helper. You may feel tempted to use Facebook to coordinate help, but I implore you to take the small extra step of getting email addresses so you can use one of the free, online volunteer coordination tools that will save *you* oodles of time and save *everyone* a great deal of confusion and frustration.

To easily create this email list, just ask the person who needs help to send an email similar to the following example to anyone she'd invite to a big party she was having (and I mean BIG). Tell her to include anyone who she would help if the shoe were on the other foot, so to speak.

Here's a sample email:

Hey Everyone,

A friend from church, Jenn, has kindly offered to assist us in getting the help we need over the next few weeks. (The person who needs help can include a quick update on her situation here if she's comfortable, but it's not necessary.) Please look for an email from her with more info. Thanks so much for keeping our family in your thoughts and prayers.

*Take care,
Sarah*

You can easily "Reply All" to the example email above with an email that briefly explains how you are going to organize people who would like to help the family. (Don't worry – I'll get to how you are going to easily do this soon!)

If someone needs a lot of help for a longer period of time, remind her of the many, many people in her life who are desperately looking for a way to help them. And then encourage her to forward your email to the parent lists from all of the activities her family is involved in – such as her children's school classes, sports teams, choirs or Scouts. With this person's permission, you can also invite church members to help.

Don't forget to also include neighbors and out-of-town friends and family. Long-distance friends can purchase restaurant gift cards or pay for cleaning services, for example.

Remember, people usually enjoy helping. Most people just don't know what to do and are afraid of burdening the family with questions. It is your job to give them a way to help. And it will be a blessing to everyone involved. I promise.

You don't need to have a name associated with each email or put them into a fancy spreadsheet. The key here is to take some shortcuts so you can help this family *fast*.

Step 3: Save time with free, online volunteer coordination tools.

Take advantage of one of the time-saving and free websites that enable you to easily organize and mobilize volunteers. Although each website offers different methods, most follow the same basic pattern. First, you'll create a list of needs for particular dates. Then, you'll be able to invite potential volunteers to sign up via a link you send in an email.

You and the volunteers will be able to view all the needs on an online calendar. You'll be able to see which needs have been assigned and which are still available. And the website will send automatic reminders to volunteers who have signed up to complete an activity. Isn't technology wonderful?! Here are a few sites to consider:

- [CaringBridge](#)
- [CareCalendar](#)
- [Lotsa Helping Hands](#)
- [Meal Train](#)
- [SignUpGenius](#)

Step 4: Pack the freezer!

When someone is going through a hard time, our first instinct usually is to feed them! And although a fresh, hot meal might be perfect for celebrating a new baby, there are other times when managing meal deliveries two or three times a week creates more work than it saves. Trying to sync delivery times and meal times with the schedules of those who may be to and fro from the hospital or doctor's office adds a lot of unnecessary stress.

I once visited the husband of a dear friend who was in the ICU. When he came out to greet me, he was carrying a casserole dish! Someone had thought it was a good idea to bring him an entire meal while he was at the hospital. I love the heart of this helper, but I think a gift card or cash to pay for a meal at the hospital would likely have been a better choice all around. Plus there's no dish to return!

One of the easiest and fastest ways to help with meals is to pack your friend's freezer with meals she can thaw and bake when she wants. Packing the freezer gives the recipient more flexibility and requires less coordination for everyone involved.

To easily and quickly pack her freezer, set up an event where friends can deliver meals (ideally already frozen for 24-plus hours) at a set time and place. If you have coolers to transport the meals, I suggest holding the event at your church so your friend doesn't have the burden of receiving a bunch of visitors to her home.

Before you organize your pack-the-freezer event, figure out how much freezer space your friend has. If it's a small freezer, try and find someone with a deep freezer where you can store the meals until your friend is ready for them.

After you've set the time and location, create an email inviting people to help you pack your friend's freezer. Also, give people the option of bringing gift cards to restaurants or grocery stores if they'd rather not cook (like me!).

Here's a sample invitation for a pack-the-freezer party:

Hello friends of Sarah and Jack Smith!

As you may know, Sarah recently broke both arms in a bad fall, and she and her family need our help. You will soon receive an email explaining how to sign up to help the family with various needs, but we are also holding a pack-the-freezer party for the Smith family.

*When?
[insert date]*

*Where?
[insert address]*

*What?
Bring one or more already frozen meals for the Smith family (serving 4-6 people in a disposable dish) and/or restaurant or grocery gift cards.*

Please note the following important instructions for preparing your meal so we can best help the Smith family by making meal-time easy.

Important Pack-the-Freezer Meal Instructions:

- Package the meal into disposable, freezable and oven-ready containers. If possible, divide the meal into containers that serve four to six people. (Containers will not be returned.)*
- Securely fasten a note to the container with your name, telephone, email address, thawing and baking instructions, and the date you made and froze the meal.*
- Please do not deliver the meals directly to the Smith home.*
- The Smith family likes most foods, but here are some ideas: pasta, pizza, taco filling, enchiladas, lasagna, BBQ chicken, chicken nuggets and meatloaf.*
- There are no food allergies.*

If you need an alternate delivery time or have questions, please contact me. If we fill up the Smith's freezer, we will store additional meals in my freezer. I will deliver them when Sarah has more room in her freezer.

The Smith family will gladly accept gift cards in lieu of meals, if that's more convenient for you. Just bring the gift cards to our pack-the-freezer party or contact me to make arrangements. Thank you, in advance, for helping the Smith family! Your contribution will be greatly appreciated!

Thanks!

Step 5: Give volunteers the option to hire help.

Depending on your volunteers' circumstances, some may have more money than time and may prefer hiring help rather than doing it themselves.

Give volunteers the option to hire help, such as a cleaning service, yard care, transport services, babysitters or even pet sitters. In this day and age, you can hire someone to do just about anything!

Outsourcing help may not seem as personal as providing help directly, but it gets the job done which is what matters most.

Step 6: Thank your volunteers!

“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks,” said James Allen, a British philosopher. (This is at least twice as important as anything else in this article.)

Be sure to find numerous ways to thank volunteers on behalf of your friend. Consider including real quotes from your friend about how the volunteers have really helped the family in your emails. If your friend is OK with this, also provide an update of your friend's status so volunteers continue to feel involved and informed.

If we all work together, we can help everyone who needs help. Imagine it! No more feelings of wanting to help, but not knowing how. No more people needing help, but not getting it. It may sound like a dream, but I believe that together we can make this a reality. Carry on!

