



*A Guide Through*  
**SUFFERING**

FOR THE COMPANION

BROOKE P. LEE

# From Me To You

Hi.

If we haven't had the chance to meet yet, I'm Brooke. I lost my only sister to a heroin overdose in 2011. Although I had experienced hardship and pain prior to her death and have experienced it in a number of ways since, it was my first introduction to a sort of suffering I could not control, manage, reduce, or simply move on from.

While there were a number of painful experiences during this season of suffering, one of the most crushing was how ill-equipped people were at walking alongside me in my pain. After the initial surge of sympathy phone calls, texts, cards, and flowers, the comfort and support seemed to dry up. People stopped calling. Expectations that I should get back to normal were implied. Time limits on grief were hinted at. And while I know these nudges were mostly coming from a good place—people wanting me to “get better”—they mainly left me feeling worse off.

I remember reading my Bible during this particular season of suffering and being drawn to how much of Jesus' time was spent with the sufferer: the dad whose daughter had died (Mark 5:21-43), the bleeding woman (Luke 8:43-48), the sister who lost her sibling (John 11:1-44), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), and on and on and on. It almost seemed as if Jesus were partial to the sufferer. Yet, the opposite seemed to be true of a lot of Christians I knew.

The reality was, and still is, that most American Christians tend to run from those suffering. And if they don't run, their response is typically one of the following:

1. Try to fix the person suffering, getting them “back to normal.”
2. Solve the suffering, providing answers or reasons as to why the suffering happened.
3. Point out the good that will eventually come from the suffering.

All these responses, while well intentioned, often make the *comforter* feel better, but hardly offer any real consolation to the *sufferer*. They also aren't characteristic of God and His response to suffering we see all throughout Scripture. This is essentially why I wrote this guide.

One of the hardest realities of this life is that suffering isn't going anywhere. Whether we like it or not, suffering is part of our human experience. But our current way of responding to it is not working. We need to learn to get along with suffering. We need more language to talk about it, and more examples of how to truly care for someone in the midst of it. We need to better understand what actually heals and ministers to someone suffering, and what doesn't. And finally, we need to do a better job of honoring suffering, allowing it to take up its appropriate space in our lives and in others' lives.

I'm so thankful you've picked up this guide. I believe you have been positioned in a sufferer's life with great intention and purpose. This place of walking alongside someone as they suffer is Holy Ground. It really is. And it's my hope that we will start treating it as such.

I have prayed for you as you walk alongside your suffering loved one. I've asked God to give you stamina and strength for the long-haul suffering often is. I've asked the Holy Spirit to fill you with courage and grace as you enter and remain in this sacred yet messy place. And I've asked Jesus to impart His gentle wisdom, humility, and care onto your soul—after all, it was He who gave us the best example of how to companion the sufferer.

Together, let's learn how to walk alongside those suffering.

I'm with you in it,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brooke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B".

Brooke

# Introduction

Most of us have heard of Job. He was a blameless and upright man of God who was subjected to Satan's worst destruction. In a matter of days, Job lost his children, his servants, his livestock, his livelihood, and even his health. It's a heart-wrenching account—whether true or metaphorical—of someone experiencing the worst this life has to offer.

I'm assuming you picked up this guide because someone you love and care about is facing some of the worst this life has to offer, and you want to know how to be there for them in this unimaginable time.

To learn how to companion our suffering loved ones through their dark valley, we're going to look at the account of Job—specifically, the response from some of his closest friends. We're going to see how these three friends (at least at first) showed up, how they offered support, and how they companioned Job in those fresh days of grief. Unfortunately, as many people know, the friends' support and companionship went drastically downhill from here, but I don't want us to miss the fact that their initial response was spot on. So, we will use their response as not only our guide, but as a framework for how we are to companion our suffering loved ones.

In the first chapter, we'll see how Job's friends simply showed up. We'll talk about the importance of showing up when someone faces suffering and I'll give you different examples of how to do that. Next, we'll look at what to say, and what not to say, as well as helpful guidelines and reminders as you engage with your suffering loved one. In chapter three we'll look at the friends' motives for showing up and we'll turn inward to become aware of and reflect on our own motives. Chapter four will lead us to see how Job's friends engaged in the forgotten practice of lament, and I'll walk you through how to lament with your suffering loved one. We'll end by talking about how to companion your loved one for the long haul that suffering often is.

Before I release you into the work of this guide, I want to remind you of two noble truths.

First, Scripture tells us that God is near to the brokenhearted, which means as we learn how to occupy this space alongside our brokenhearted loved ones, we are also sharing space and communing with God. This work is a practice of encountering God and being in His midst in a place where we often overlook His presence. Lean into this.

Second, as we learn how to show up and lean into this suffering space, we are taking on the very shape, characteristics, and nature of God. One of God's characteristics is that He is a companion to the sufferer. So, as we practice companioning our suffering loved one, we are simultaneously practicing being like God.

I share all this to remind you that this work matters. It is Holy and Christ-shaping. So, let the

# Why It Matters For Eternity

Most if not all people in America have heard about Jesus by now. If someone wants to “check Jesus out” they’ll simply tune in to a few sermons online or listen to a podcast or two and decide from there whether or not Jesus is real, needed, and/or “for them.” The various introductions to Jesus have changed drastically from what they were in the past.

I’ve been increasingly intrigued by one gateway to Jesus over the last decade or so. It was the gateway my sister walked through in the midst of her addiction, the same gateway my cousin walked through a year after receiving her husband’s Stage 4 cancer diagnosis, and the same gateway my dad walked through ten days after my sister’s passing.

The gateway? Suffering.

It seems here, at this painful intersection of what a person thought would happen in their life and the tragedy of what actually transpires, that Jesus and His power, promises, and healing become real, needed, and enticing, maybe for the first time. When suffering hits a person’s life, all the self-care, self-talk, quick fixes, good vibes, and positive thinking fall flat. These things don’t actually heal or relieve, which leaves that person grasping for something or, in many cases, Someone who does.

The valley of suffering seems to be one of the ripest grounds for salvation. Unfortunately, it’s also the most un-shepherded. Jesus followers are often known for fleeing those suffering rather than shepherding them, leaving many to wander the throes of pain largely on their own, which often leads to further harm and destruction to their and others’ lives. The Kingdom is in desperate need of women and men who are willing to do the work of getting equipped so they can shepherd those suffering toward the healing and life-saving power and presence of Jesus. Your neighbor whose marriage has just imploded, your friend who just miscarried, your family member riding the roller coaster of addiction, your coworker who is battling cancer...they need you to learn how to suffer with them. They need you to learn how to honor their pain, give space to its complexities, and refrain from fixing them. Instead they need you to walk alongside them, just like Jesus did, as they navigate this inconceivable journey.

The stakes are high. Souls are on the line. And God’s plan is you and me. How we equip ourselves to companion someone through suffering will have a significant impact on eternity.

# Ch. 1 Introduction

I got the news of my sister's passing on a Tuesday night. All I wanted to do was crawl under a rock and pretend it hadn't happened, or at least stay there until I came to terms with her death a bit. I couldn't bear the thought of calling anyone and saying out loud that my sister was dead. After an hour or two, I forced myself to text a handful of people, mainly out of necessity—I needed to postpone and cancel some plans I had for the upcoming weeks. Many of the people responded with voicemails and texts of sadness and sympathy. I left those messages largely unanswered.

The next morning while packing my bag for my flight home, there was a knock at my front door. I opened it up to find my friend Sus standing there. She was one of the few people I had texted the day before. There she stood, with coffee in hand and compassionate eyes. I collapsed into her arms with tears and wails. We eventually made our way inside my house. Sus immediately started cleaning the dishes in my sink, helped me pick out what clothes to pack, and then insisted on driving me to the airport to catch my flight. It was a messy, sad, and at times awkward and uncomfortable space, yet it did not deter Sus from showing up and staying present with me.

Throughout the morning Sus allowed me to sit in silence, cry, share details as they came to mind, and pour out some of my deepest aches, questions, and fears. She offered no answers and provided no solutions. She simply shared space with me. Her response still brings me to tears when I think of it, serving as a poignant example of someone showing up in one of my worst moments.

Job 2:11 tells a similar account of Job's friends showing up. Immediately after hearing the news of Job's suffering, the friends set out from their homes to be with him. It's profoundly simple, really. Many of us think our response to someone suffering should be grandiose, or at least significant enough to match the gravity of their suffering. But rarely, if ever, is this true. Most often, sufferers simply need and want their loved ones to just show up. Just like Sus did, and just like Job's friends did.

The reason why I've dedicated an entire chapter to this profoundly simple act of showing up, is that most sufferers will tell you it's often overlooked. Alongside suffering there's a harmful and destructive trend that surfaces as many friends and family flee instead of showing up. In my own life, several friends and family members simply dropped off the radar upon hearing of my sister's passing. The sad reality is that my experience was not unique. Every sufferer I know has a handful of relationships that ended or fizzled out when tragedy hit.

So, in this chapter we're going to learn how to show up for our suffering loved ones. We'll look at the various ways we can go about this, and what to keep in mind as we do.