

Published based on [Five Tangible Ways to Show You Care](#)

Five Tangible Ways to Show You Care



Following the tornadoes of April 27, story after story after story of the pain and devastation is being told by Alabamians, from newspapers to facebook to one on one encounters. I was privileged this week to have an opportunity to listen to some of those traumatic stories as survivors struggled to put words to their emotions.

Trauma.

We might define it as an event outside the range of normal human experience which has the potential to cause long-lasting effects.

Such an 'event' was April 27, 2011, when my home state of Alabama was hit unrelentingly by a series of tornadoes. It was the worst deadly tornado outbreak in U.S. history affecting seven southern states leaving at least 350 people dead and some still uncounted for.

Damage estimates are upwards of 5 billion dollars. More than 20,000 homes lost in Alabama alone. The American Red Cross rates such disasters on a scale of 1-6, with 6 being the worst. They have rated the devastation in Alabama at a 6 and are considering making a new category, a 7, to describe what has happened here.

What can we do when others' lives are affected by such traumatic experiences, whether they are natural disasters, accidental disasters, intentional disasters, or events such as war, kidnapping, the suicide or homicide of a loved one, sexual or spousal abuse?

The following is an incomplete list of thoughts and not listed necessarily in the order of importance. I am not including prayer because I will assume that you all know prayer is appropriate and important.

1. Provide tangible care.

I am often reminded of the story of the little boy who was crying in bed during a major thunder storm. His mother came into the room and began to comfort him. In doing so, she reminded the little boy that "Jesus was with him always and he didn't need to be afraid." In responding, the boy looked up at his mother and said "Yes, Mom, but I need Jesus with skin on."

There are times when we all need Jesus with skin on, and times when we must be Jesus with skin on to others.

Thousands of people across the U.S. have come to our area to work alongside Alabamians to provide tangible care for the hurting, becoming expressions of Jesus with skin on. The response has been overwhelming. Local agencies have had to ask people to stop bringing certain supplies. Churches everywhere are helping and working together and with relief agencies. It is a glorious hour for the body of Christ; she is shining in Alabama.

I'll never forget how I felt after being out-of-state for two weeks for a marriage intensive when my heart was in so much pain, and I came home to find that a handful of strong, beautiful women had done everything within their power to tangibly let me know they cared. They had cleaned my house, redecorated rooms, given of their own time, money, and resources to say, "Feel the love." They gave me chocolates and flowers. They gave of themselves – tangibly (<http://mikkiblogs.com/feel-the-love/>).

2. Listen.

We often rush to give people answers when what they really need is just for us to listen. Listening, while resisting the need to give answers, excuse God or others, preach or correct, can sometimes be the very best help.

Haven't we all felt offended when we were pouring out our heart to someone because we needed a listening ear and they kept trying to fix the situation or provide pat answers or religious jargon?

We don't always have to have answers.

The truth is that we often do not have the answer.

We can trust the One who does. Those answers are often held in the mysteries of God and to rush into someone's pain and try to fix it too quickly can feel invalidating of the level of pain they are feeling. It is appropriate to allow people to struggle through their crisis while providing love and support. In the struggle, they can find authentic answers or the grace to live in the mystery. If they are not allowed to enter this struggle, they may later quickly abandon the cookie cutter answers we have provided them.

3. Be present.

Being present is another tangible way to show you care.

So many times, followers of Christ feel inadequate because they don't know what to say. When I think back to the time when my brother was killed in a car accident, I can't remember most of what was said to me, but I do remember many of the ones who made an effort to just be there for me. And referring back to point number one, I remember the women who cleaned my house and brought food and a dear lady who sorted the socks in my sock basket!

I remember how inadequate most of my community of faith felt when a dear sister lost two daughters and one of their friends in a car accident where they were burned alive. It was the greatest of horrors. I just held my friend in my arms and we both cried. It was not appropriate for me to try to give her answers on that day. She just needed the gift of my presence and my physical touch.

The book of Job recounts the story of Job's long series of traumatic events. He had some friends show up to check on him:

Job 2:12 And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. 13 So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.

Although Job's friends did not get it right later, they did get it right when they sat with him for seven days without speaking a word. Such a response validated the greatness of his pain. There were no words.

4. Cry with them.

If you feel like crying with those who are hurting, do so! You don't always have to be strong for people. Authentic crying over someone else's story says you identify with their pain.

5. Be there for the long haul when you can.

Many times after the initial crisis is over, we forget to provide care or we are uncomfortable with others' long term pain, and yet people are still hurting. Cards, calls, and other tangible expressions are still needed and helpful.

Is there a way today that you can provide tangible care to someone who is hurting?

We can't meet every need, but we can meet some. Will you ask God to show you what you can do?

Perhaps you are the hurting one. If so, I am praying that you will receive the tangible care of another.

You can also find this article published on [Five Tangible Ways to Show You Care](#), and on the tag pages [Alabama](#), [being present](#), [Crisis](#), [crying](#), [empathy](#), [Job](#), [Job 2](#), [listening](#), [survivors](#), [tornadoes](#), [trauma](#).