

B E I N G
T H E R E

How to Love Those Who Are Hurting



D A V E F U R M A N

“When Jesus said that he came to serve and not be served, he must’ve had in mind the many people who help Dave Furman. This remarkable story provides soul-strengthening encouragement to those who daily bear the burdens of people like me and Dave, people who just need a helping hand, day after day. I intend to give *Being There* to the many people who are daily there for me, a quadriplegic—it’s a must read for any believer who desires to follow Jesus in a life of service to others.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Founder and CEO, Joni and Friends
International Disability Center

“As a long-term chronic pain sufferer, a pastor to suffering people, and a friend of Dave’s, I highly recommend this book. It is deeply personal, painful, and, above all, hopeful, and I am so glad he has taken the time to share his experiences. This book will point professionals, husbands, wives, and the friends of those who suffer from long-term chronic pain to the glorious truths found in the gospel of Jesus. This is not a book that offers easy solutions, but instead brings Bible-centered counsel to bear on the dark moments of life.”

Mez McConnell, Senior Pastor, Niddrie Community Church,
Edinburgh, Scotland; Director, 20schemes; author, *Church in
Hard Places*

“As I think about the people in my world with chronic pain and ongoing difficulties, and about my awkwardness in knowing how best to walk with them, I can’t imagine a better guide than Dave Furman. *Being There* is filled with insight that only someone who has walked this road can provide.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible Teacher; author, *Seeing Jesus in the
Old Testament Bible study series*

“As we see in the Scriptures, suffering can create confusion and consternation. How are we to think rightly about darker times? Even more, how can we minister to those suffering and see them (and those nearest to them) in all their humanity to support and encourage? Dave Furman has served us well with *Being There*. It is an immensely practical book that is saturated with the truth of God’s Word. I have read many books on suffering, and Dave has some unique insights that will encourage your heart. So, whether you are reading this for you, or because someone you love is currently struggling, I believe this book will serve to lift up your eyes to your loving Father who knows your situation and hasn’t abandoned you!”

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas;
President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network; author, *The Mingling
of Souls*

“Pastors: you will love chapter 8. It will supply your church with invaluable guidelines for helping others. The rest of us: we will be better friends to those who suffer when we meditate on Dave’s wise counsel.”

Ed Welch, counselor and faculty, The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

“Too often, books are written for the hurting, and the person left out is the friend or family member who is helping the hurting. That’s why Dave Furman’s *Being There* will be an invaluable resource.”

Deepak Reju, Associate Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; President, Board of Directors, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“Dave Furman has written an insightful and needed book for those who find themselves at a loss when it comes to helping hurting people. Writing from the vantage point of one who daily struggles with pain, Dave gives authoritative counsel to those eager to learn the art of being present and the skill of giving practical care.”

JR Vassar, Lead Pastor, Church at the Cross, Grapevine, Texas; author, *Glory Hunger*

“Dave Furman has written a book that will be a huge blessing to those who read it and to the suffering friends God has given them the privilege of serving. This is full of pastoral wisdom, profound theology, and deeply personal experience. It is a beautiful book with a beautiful message.”

Sam Allberry, Pastor, St. Mary’s Church, Maidenhead, United Kingdom; Editor, The Gospel Coalition

“So much of the Christian life is a matter of simply being there—for those who are hurting. For many years Dave Furman has faithfully modeled being there for others while he himself has benefited from those who have been there for him. This gives him a unique perspective and wisdom in crafting a book about helping the hurting. I highly recommend it.”

Tim Challies, blogger, Challies.com

Being There

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How to Love Those Who Are Hurting

Dave Furman

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To my sweet bride, Gloria.
Thank you for trusting God in our trials and for
always pointing me to our Savior, Jesus Christ.
I love you.

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during our initial trials in the desert, our story would have had a bitter ending.

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Introduction

I keep a photograph in my office of me picking up my fiancée, Gloria, in my strong, capable arms. A few months later on our honeymoon, we were white-knuckling the handles of a raft in the rapids of Costa Rica. Fast forward a decade and our circumstances were quite different. On our tenth anniversary, a kind stranger offered me his help as he saw Gloria trying her best to lift my disabled body out of an inner tube at a water park. I can only imagine what was going through that gentleman's mind when he saw me struggling to float down the lazy river.

When I was a child, I played tennis and earned two black belts in karate. As a university student, I played pick-up football on my college campus. I never dreamed that I would soon have a physical disability. It's been over ten years now since my doctor discovered that the nerves in my arms weren't working properly—firing off chronic pain signals to my brain and twisting themselves into painful neuromas. I've had four major surgeries on my arms, gone through over a dozen invasive procedures in the hospital, worked for hundreds of hours in therapy, and taken a cocktail of medicines and homeopathic remedies to give me some relief. But nothing has really worked.

I never thought that there would be times when I couldn't lift a cup of water to my lips to take a drink or would need the help of

my preschool-aged daughter to button my shirt. I can count on one hand the number of times I've been able to hold any one of my four babies. After my wife makes sure that all of our children are buckled in properly to their car seats, she comes around to the passenger side of the minivan and opens my door. Once she is in the driver's seat, she leans over to buckle my seat belt for me.

On a trip to the United States for a conference, I was eating lunch with a big group of pastors. Without a word, Mack, one of the elders of our church, leaned over and graciously cut my steak for me so I could eat it. Sensing the awkwardness around the table of pastors who were not aware of my disability, he joked, "Don't your elders serve *you* like this?"

Eight years ago, our family moved overseas to plant churches on the Arabian Peninsula. I had surgery a few months prior and was recovering very well. We were hopeful that the pain and disability were now behind us. Then one night while driving in a parking lot as Gloria did some late-night shopping, I felt a sharp burning pain in both of my arms. The problem was back, and it was back with a vengeance. We were so excited about what we had perceived as total healing and were thrilled about plans for the new churches we'd be planting, but instead our hopes went spiraling downward.

The next week a rash of painful bumps covered both of my hands down to my fingertips, and I couldn't bear to touch anything. Depression engulfed me, and I would stay awake most nights pacing back and forth in my bedroom on the verge of losing my mind. In those dark hours of the night Gloria thought I was going crazy and took comfort in the fact that I was not physically able to get out of the house and wander into the desert. We had tried everything, and nothing worked. There was no relief, no joy.

This is how our ministry started in the Middle East. Every weekend Gloria would buckle our baby daughter and me into our seats, and she'd drive us two hours to Dubai to meet people, attend

our partner church, and build contacts for a potential church plant in the center of that city. I would “turn it on” for a few hours, be cordial, cast vision for the church, and then I’d become a shell of myself for the next five days. I was just trying to survive.

And even worse, I had turned into a grumpy, passive-aggressive man. To my great regret, I had completely disengaged from my daughter. I not-so-secretly blamed Gloria for everything. If I was in pain, it was her fault. I didn’t know I was struggling with depression at the time, but I knew something wasn’t right and I wanted to snap out of it—but nothing changed. The darkness simply would not lift. I was disabled, depressed, and angry.

Throughout this trial I felt like the victim and the only one who was suffering. Nobody understood how I felt. The whole world revolved around me and existed to serve me and help me. I started playing the “if only” game. It’s the game where in your mind you say, “If only _____, then I’ll be happy.” For example:

When I’m hungry: If only I had something to eat, *then* I would have joy.

When people criticize me: If only they would go away, *then* I would be happy.

If my bank account is empty: If only I had more money, *then* I could give my kids the life they deserve.

If only my family member hadn’t died . . .

If only I didn’t have this health condition . . .

If only . . . if only . . .

For me, the “if only” game was all about having healthy arms. If only my arms weren’t hurting, *then* I’d be happy. I said this every day, maybe even every hour, to myself. It became my gospel. John Calvin famously said that our hearts are idol factories, and we are constantly creating different idols to bring us happiness.¹ For me

it was the idol of comfort that I thought would come only if I had healthy arms and no more pain.

I didn't realize how much my idol pursuit was affecting my wife. I wasn't alone in my distress as I paced the floor those long nights in our bedroom. Gloria was awake too. She was praying for me and was also struggling to hold fast to her hope in God. While I was pacing the floors wondering if I'd ever be able to hold my baby, my wife paced in her own mind wondering if she would ever have a "normal" husband. My idol was the comfort of healthy arms; Gloria's idol was the comfort of a husband with healthy arms. Now, on the other side of that season of depression, I can see clearly that pain and suffering affect not only the one directly experiencing them, but also *everyone* around that person.

Unfortunately our story is not a unique or isolated tale. I've talked to many families that have been affected by chronic pain, disability, sickness, loss, and depression. A fellow pastor and friend of mine named John also struggles with a disability in both of his hands. He has a hard time typing and doing normal household chores, which leaves his wife to pick up the slack and wait patiently for times when he feels well enough to contribute. John encouraged me to write this book for those caring for the hurting. I am writing out of my experience of being helped in incredible ways by others in my disability. There are much better books on the topic of suffering. However, this is not another book about suffering for the one who suffers. It's a book for everyone who knows people who suffer from pain and loss and wants to see the Rock of Ages underneath their feet. I think it's safe to say that this is a book for all of us.

The aim of chapter 1 is to bring encouragement and healing for you, the caregiver who suffers in silence. Before I can even talk about how to help those who are hurting, you need to first examine your own heart in the process. You can't pretend that you haven't experienced loss and grief in another's pain. The goal of chapter 2

is to show where your strength in helping the hurting comes from. The remaining chapters will help you practically care for those hurting in your life. There's even an afterword written by my wife, Gloria, where she honestly shares her experience in caring for me in the darkest times.

We all know people who are in pain. We may have a child who struggles with a learning disability, a spouse who is disabled, a friend fighting cancer, a neighbor or fellow church member with chronic pain, an aging parent suffering with any number of illnesses, or those who have lost loved ones.

Maybe you have found yourself asking the following questions:

- How should I, as a church member, respond when a fellow church member is hurting?
- How do I, as a husband or wife, serve and love my spouse who struggles with chronic pain and is distant and emotionally unengaged?
- How should I care for my aging parents in a way that honors both them and God?
- What truth should I speak into the life of a friend who is on his deathbed?
- How do I interact with my cousin who is paralyzed and is living in despair?
- How do I care for a wife who is brokenhearted over a marriage that seems to be falling apart?
- How do I encourage young married couples who are struggling with miscarriages or infertility?

Maybe you're struggling in your care, and you feel like you can't go on and there is nothing you can do to help the hurting person in your life. You're right, on your own you can't. The goal of this entire book is to point you to Jesus, who is your only hope, and to walk you through some ways you can love those who hurt with the strength God provides.

Caring for Your Own Soul As You Care for Others

We all know people suffering from sickness, disability, depression, or grief. Oftentimes, we who love and support the hurting suffer in our own unique ways. What's more, our own struggles to cope with stress and pain often go unnoticed. Where are we to find strength in such circumstances?

Writing out of his own experience of needing care on a daily basis, Dave Furman offers support, encouragement, and wisdom for those called to care for others in need—equipping us to effectively care for the hurting and pointing us to the strength that God provides.

“This remarkable story provides soul-strengthening encouragement to those who daily bear the burdens of people like me and Dave, people who just need a helping hand, day after day. It's a must read for any believer who desires to follow Jesus in a life of service to others.”

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NANCY GUTHRIE, Bible teacher; author, *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament Bible study series*

DAVE FURMAN (ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary) serves as the senior pastor of Redeemer Church of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, which he planted in 2010. Ten years ago, Dave developed a nerve disease and struggles with disability in both arms. He and his wife, Gloria, have four children.

PAIN & SUFFERING

