



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

“WHEN THERE ARE NO WORDS” — JUST BE THERE

David Anguish

Charlie Walton and his wife answered the door to a policeman bearing the worst news parents can hear. Two of their sons had been found dead. A friend, home from college, was found with them.

I didn't know the Waltons, but had worked with the other young man's mother and taught his younger sister. Stunned doesn't begin to describe what each of us felt in the emergency faculty meeting called the following cold December morning.

Walton later wrote about the experience in *When There Are No Words*, a book that “describes that terrible moment when you want to say something to console a friend or loved one and *no words seem appropriate*” (from the back cover). I recommend it, or something like it, because unfortunately, even “when no words seem appropriate,” we usually feel something needs to be said. Often, those we comfort remember it, but not always in a good way. So, we are wise to remember some basics.

Keep it Scriptural. We Christians should excel here, but some have apparently accepted some of the world's distortions. One I've heard often affirms, “God now has another angel.” Whatever else we can know about angels, the Bible always distinguishes between angels and people. At death, we pass to another realm of existence; we do not become different creatures.

Don't presume to know God's mind. It may frustrate us, but God has simply not revealed specific thoughts about our life events. We are less than helpful (to be charitable) when we act like he has. Telling an impressionable child who still thinks his grandpa can do everything that, “God just needed your grandpa more than we do” is both presumptuous and may lead him to wonder what kind of God would just take his grandpa. Hard questions about God may eventually come (cf. Gen. 18:25). We should not help them along with ill-informed comments at the wake or funeral.

Postpone big theological questions. Grieving people often feel and express anger at their loss. Sometimes, they direct it toward God – urgently, passionately, forcefully. We can help by providing them a safe place to vent. More discussion may be needed later;

then again, it may not be. If it is, we also help by letting them know we will still be there for them then.

None of this should be taken to mean that we should not offer comfort to the grieving. As one who has been on the receiving end of that support, I struggle for words to describe just how strengthening it is. Others need us in those tough times. So, go. Comfort. Tell them how sorry you are for their loss. Tell them you're praying for them.

And if those words seem insufficient, remember this wisdom from Walton: "every hug dilutes the pain."

September 2011
www.davidanguish.com