

A Tender Helplessness

As a preacher and pastor over the past forty years, I have often been called upon in times of grief and bereavement. I have been at the side of the elderly as they have passed from this life into their rest. I knelt beside the lifeless body of a 21-year-old man after he crashed his ultra-light airplane in his parents' backyard—as they watched horrified and helpless. I have spoken with the families of children killed in accidents and of a man murdered in his own bed. I have hugged the baby and prayed with the widow left behind by a man killed in a coal-mining accident.

Some of these deaths were tragic, some were horrific and some were a welcome release. Even in the ones that brought release from long, slow tortured dyings, there was still loss. In some cases, the loss is so shocking, so painful and so unfair that there are no words to describe the agony nor are there words to take away such pain. In greater frankness than some will find comfortable, I will tell you that my own belief is that sometimes there is no “why,” no grand reason, just physics and/or human choices. But even if there is a “why,” does that really console us?

Ultimately, it is not explanation and understanding that we want. No philosophy, no cliché, no rhyme or rationalization can heal the hole that we feel within us. Even the greatest expressions of empathy, though precious and treasured, cannot fill the measure of our loss. While the tears and prayers of others show us that we are loved, and our own deep faith somehow sustains us, these things cannot erase the blackness that sinks its fangs into our hearts. Anger, wrath and rage, even vengeance may divert us with blinding darkness but they cannot take away the loss. Not even the heaviest justice of the courts can give us the deepest desire of our heart.

What we want, quite simply, is to have the thing undone. We want our friend, our child, our sibling, our parent, our loved one given back to us in good condition. That is what we want. We want the empty chair filled, the empty plate served full and warm, the silence filled by the former sounds. We want to hear the laughter, feel the warmth, see that lopsided grin and know once again the closeness. That is what we remember, what we cherish and what we want.

And it is precisely that thing that we can never have again—at least not in this world, though perhaps in a better one—and it is that knowledge that pierces us through with sorrow.

But does this sorrow have to leave us in despair? Can we grieve and ache and yet still live on? Even though things will never be the same again, can we yet find strength to face another day and grace to move forward? Can we continue with Life yet still honor the love and memory of those we have lost?

I believe that we can; I believe that we do; I believe that we are. The empty chair testifies to the hole that is left in our lives, an empty space the size and shape of our relationship with that person.

And yet all the other chairs, the ones in which we survivors sit, testify of something else. Something ageless and wonderful. All these chairs say, “We are still here, in spite of all of life’s loss and heartache, in spite of all the misery and challenge and the drudgery of our most mundane moments, we are still here and we will not give up nor give in. We will continue loving.”

In spite of these awful achings, we remember also the things that give us joy, that give us hope, that give us light. We are still grateful for all the good that is in our lives, for whatever measure of peace we have found and for these others whose presence tells us that we are loved.

Even in this tremendous agony, God is yet at work for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. And a certain immeasurable part of that calling and that purpose is for us to share the sorrow and sow seeds of kindness and compassion in these times of tragic loss and terrible cost. Our purpose is not to take away the pain, but to show that we care.

H. Arnett—12/8/16—<https://docarnett.wordpress.com/2016/12/08/a-tender-helplessness/>

PRAYER LIST

- **Pauline Alvarez**
- **Lauren Babb** (health)
- **John Beiler** (health)
- **Jim Carpenter** (Cody Chrismon’s great uncle—health)
- **Cinco Ranch Church of Christ**
- **Betty Cox** (Brent Barnick’s sister—homebound)
- **Jake Faires** (Air Force, deployed to Jordan)
- **Steven Faires, and Lexi**
- **Nelle Hahn** (health)
- **Shirley Kuchykna** (knee surgery)
- **Molly Lind** (Linds’ daughter-in-law)
- **Clay Mason** (health)
- **Norman Pennock** (Debbie Fougerat’s step-father, health)
- **Ada Powell** (Sharron Mason’s sister—health)
- **T.J. Reid** (Nelle Hahn’s brother—health)
- **Julie Rodriguez** (Babbs’ friend—health)
- **Kathy Schumacher** (Cody Chrismon’s mother—recovering from surgery)
- **Nancy Tuttle** (Peggy Walls’s sister—health)
- **Catherine Winegeart** (Perry’s mother—health)

If you have any announcements or prayer requests you wish to have included in the bulletin or to sign up for weekly e-mail updates, please contact Victoria Johnson: 325-518-9205, victoria@gonzaleschurchofchrist.org.

PRAYER UPDATES

Cathy Jones, Leanna Mason’s mother, broke a bone in her leg.

Shirley Kuchynka is having full knee replacement surgery tomorrow in Gonzales. She will spend a few nights in the hospital and then move to The Heights for rehab.

Beth McElroy, Clay and Mary Mason’s daughter, is struggling with health issues.

We extend sympathy to all those affected by the tragedy at **First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs**. If you wish to make a donation, you may do so through the church’s official Website at <http://ssfbc.net/>.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Youth Sunday: Rocky Creek Maze

Please join us **TODAY at 2 p.m.** for youth Sunday at the Rocky Creek Maze in Moulton. After our time at Rocky Creek, we will go to dinner at La Terraza De Jalisco in Shiner (203 S Ave. E) for dinner. Our activities should conclude by 7 p.m. Admission is \$15. Please note the admission rate now includes the corn cannon and frog hopper, which used to be separate charges. You may pick up a flyer in the foyer for more information.

ISF Thanksgiving Dinner

It’s here! Our Thanksgiving dinner with ISF (Intermediate Sanction Facility) residents and staff is this Friday, Nov. 17. **Please plan to arrive at the facility between 4:15 and 4:30 p.m.** We plan to eat around 4:45 p.m.

The food will be prepared on **Wednesday, in the annex beginning at 5 p.m.** Please bring desserts to the annex by Wednesday, as well, as the food will be picked up on Thursday morning.

The sign-up sheet to provide desserts and to attend the meal is on the table in the foyer. **Please note: NO shorts, flip-flops or tight jeans are allowed at the ISF facility. NO children under 16 are allowed at the ISF facility.** We encourage all who can attend to make plans to do so, as we would like a good showing of support.

Ladies Christmas Party

Mark your calendars! This year’s Christmas party will be **Monday, Dec. 11, at 6 p.m.** at the home of Stacia Sweeney. Please bring a dish to share and an ornament to exchange.

Wednesday Evening Meal & Bible Study

Please join us at 5 p.m. this Wednesday to help prepare the Thanksgiving meal for ISF. We’ll have pizza available for dinner. Classes for all ages follow at 6 p.m.

Volunteers Needed: Wednesday Night Meals

Volunteers are needed to prepare the entrée for meals on Wednesday evenings. To help, please sign up in the foyer. **If you signed up to prepare a meal, please send Victoria your menu by Wednesday the week before.**

Volunteers Needed: Communion Prep

Volunteers are needed to prepare communion in the coming months. This task takes very little time and is a great service to the congregation. Please sign up on the large bulletin board in the foyer.

Sunday Night Small Group

There is a small group that meets in the annex each Sunday evening from **6-7 p.m.** The Lord’s Supper is available.

Tuesday Morning Men’s Prayer Breakfast

All men are invited to the annex each Tuesday morning at **6:20 a.m.** for a time of breakfast, prayer and fellowship.

YOUTH ZONE

CONGRATULATIONS TO JACY CHRISMON AND MEGAN EPLEY, AND THE SHINER HS MARCHING BAND!
THEY FINISHED 10TH AT THE STATE MARCHING CONTEST IN SAN ANTONIO ON MONDAY.



CONGRATULATIONS TO COACH KEVIN JOHNSON AND THE GONZALES HS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY TEAM!
THEY FINISHED 7TH AT THE STATE MEET IN ROUND ROCK LAST SATURDAY.



MONDAY, NOV. 13
JUNIOR HIGH GIRLS BAKSETBALL
SHINER V. FLATONIA, 5:30 P.M.
TUESDAY, NOV. 14
HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BAKSETBALL
SHINER @ YOAKUM, 6 P.M.



NOVEMBER 16-18
HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL
SHINER @ SCHULENBURG TOURNAMENT

Jacy Chrismon—Shiner HS Girls Basketball

Megan Epley—Shiner Jr High Girls Basketball