

APPENDIX 1

HOW TO SHOW UP WHEN A FRIEND'S MARRIAGE ENDS

Let me start by saying thank you—thank you for being willing to read this and for wanting to care for a friend walking through the aftermath of divorce. It means so much when someone steps in—even briefly—during a season when many step away.

As you read, remember you're not expected to do everything. You can't. And if you feel responsible for fixing your friend's problems, you may end up overwhelmed—and unintentionally make things harder for them. Trust that God knows what they need and will supply it. Pray about what to do, and step into whatever God is calling you to do—however big or small—with faith.

You may feel uncertain or unqualified, unsure if you have the time or skills to help. That's okay. As Ed Welch says, "If you feel quite weak and ordinary—if you feel like a mess but have the Spirit—you have the right credentials. You are one of the ordinary people God uses to help others."¹

Walking alongside someone may require sacrifice, but it can also be a tremendous blessing. More often than not, I've walked away just as encouraged as the person I was there to support, because the Holy Spirit met us both. As Proverbs 11:25 reminds us, "Those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed" (CEB).

If you're not sure how to start deeper conversations, consider reading this book with your friend and working through the questions on pages 147-155. The questions are designed to help your friend process what's happened and open the door to more meaningful support (you can feel free to pick and choose the ones which seem most helpful). Whether you're a close friend stepping in regularly or a more casual friend offering occasional help, both roles matter. I hope you'll keep checking in.

This appendix is divided into two parts. The first is for friends walking alongside someone they know personally. In Appendix 2, you'll find a form to give your friend to fill out, to help you better understand their needs. (There's also a companion form for you to clarify what you're able and willing to offer.) If this format feels more transactional than personal, you may prefer to use these questions as a jumping point to talk things through or write in a note. But however you do it, you'll find that clear expectations help everyone feel better supported and understood.

The second section is directed to churches and outlines practical ways for members and leaders to provide compassionate care. There's a separate questionnaire in Appendix 2 to help church leaders know what support is most needed.

Whoever you are—friend, ministry leader, or someone who simply cares—I encourage you to read both sections. Together, they offer a fuller picture of how to care well.

1 Edward Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Crossway, 2015), p. 13.

PART 1: FOR FRIENDS

One of the greatest gifts you can offer a friend going through divorce is your presence—through your words, your actions, and your willingness to stay. The acronym SHOW UP can help you remember how to care in ways that matter:

- *S — Show Up.* Be present and consistent, whether in person or from afar.
- *H — How Is Today?* Ask specific, thoughtful questions that invite honesty.
- *O — Offer Specific Help.* Don't just offer in general—name what you're able to do.
- *W — Words of Encouragement.* Speak truth that builds up without minimizing their pain.
- *U — Use Active Listening.* Pay attention in a way that helps them feel truly seen.
- *P — Pray.* Ask God for wisdom. Keep lifting your friend up to him as you walk together.

SHOW UP

This is the most meaningful thing you can do. It doesn't always mean showing up physically—though that's a gift—but it does mean making the effort to stay present in your friend's life: sending a quick check-in text, picking up the phone, sitting with them in silence, or remembering them on days that might feel extra heavy.

Showing up isn't a one-time thing. It matters that you keep showing up. Support often pours in early, but friends naturally return to their routines—often just when loneliness and exhaustion peak. Divorce recovery isn't quick or linear, but your ongoing presence can bring deep healing.

If consistency isn't possible, that's okay—just be honest about what you can offer. Divorce can heighten fears of abandonment, so following through matters. If you need to cancel plans or can't respond, initiate another time. One friend said, "Every coffee date you forget or text you don't reply to stings a little more when someone already feels forgotten. Don't underestimate the healing power of consistency."

My sister always picked up the phone when I called. If she was busy, we wouldn't talk too long, but it felt so comforting to know that I could count on someone. One divorced friend would call one of her closest friends on the way to work every day and just check in for a few minutes. Touchpoints like that remind people that they are not alone.

WHAT SHOWING UP CAN LOOK LIKE

In person (if you're local)

- Stop by to talk or invite them for coffee or a meal.
- Go to church together and plan something low-key afterward.
- Accompany them to hard events—court, reunions, or a child's music recital.
- Take a walk—side by side often feels easier than face to face.
- Set a regular rhythm: a weekly walk, a monthly dinner, a consistent text thread.

From a distance (if in-person is not feasible)

- Send a text or call them—especially on weekends or at night.
- Set up a regular phone or video check-in.

- Read this book with them and talk through a chapter each week (or however frequently they'd like) using the questions starting on page 147.
- Offer to be a “point person” to help organize support from friends, so that the weight isn't all on them.

HOW IS TODAY?

One of the best ways to support your friend is to keep checking in—but not with the usual “How are you?” That question can feel too broad to answer, especially in the middle of heartache. Most people will answer, “I'm fine” when they are barely hanging on, either because they don't know how to put their pain into words or because they're not sure anyone really wants to hear about it.

That's why asking something more focused, like “How is today?” can be more helpful. It invites honesty without demanding a full update. Your friend may still talk about the week or what's ahead, but starting with today keeps the question manageable. Ask because you care, not because you need a detailed answer. And don't stop asking—your interest, not their response, is what matters most.

Here are five specific questions that can help your friend feel seen:

1. How has today been for you?
2. What's something that surprised you recently—good or hard?
3. What do you need most right now—someone to listen, practical help, or a break from it all?
4. Is there a part of your story you wish someone would ask about or take time to understand?
5. What's on your plate this week that feels heavy? Is there anything that you're dreading or hoping for?

OFFER SPECIFIC HELP

In the wake of divorce, the emotional toll is heavy, but so is the logistical load. Meals still need to be made. Children still need rides. The laundry doesn't stop. And often, your friend has no idea of what to ask for—or how.

That's why offering specific, tangible help is one of the kindest gifts you can give. It doesn't have to be big—just specific. Well-meaning offers such as “Let me know if you need anything” are generous in intent, but they place the burden back onto the person who's already overwhelmed. A clear offer, especially when you give a couple of options, removes that pressure and often sparks ideas for what they might need, especially when they don't even know what to ask for yet. Even one thoughtful offer can go a long way.

For ongoing needs, one idea that can help everyone involved is to set up a group text that includes your friend and a few others willing to help (often 4-8 people works best). Your friend can share needs—like a ride, a meal, or just needing company—and a separate thread with the helpers can coordinate who's available. That thread can also be used to remember important dates or remind one another to check in.

To avoid silence, someone in the group can respond quickly in the main thread with “Thanks for sharing—everyone's checking their schedules, and we'll follow up soon.” If no one is able to help, a message like “We couldn't coordinate help this time, but we're so glad you reached out—we're still here for you,” helps close the loop with care.

Here's what offering help might sound like:

- “Can I bring dinner on Tuesday? Or is there a better day—and do you have any preferences?”
- “I love doing laundry. Would it help if I picked yours up on Friday and dropped it back folded?”
- “I’ve got two hours on Monday. Would it help if I ran errands for you, watched your kids, or went with you to run errands?”

WAYS TO HELP

Everyday Needs

- Bring a meal or send a gift card.
- Pick up groceries or help with errands.
- Tackle a small project together like organizing paperwork.
- Handle home tasks: repairs, yard work, tech issues, or car maintenance.

Parenting Support

- Watch the kids occasionally or regularly.
- Be a backup for school pickups, projects, or homework.
- Invite their children to hang out with your family.

Relief for What’s Overwhelming

- Be their “phone-call person” in hard moments.
- Help with emails, paperwork, or résumés.
- Offer budgeting help or assistance navigating insurance.
- Send gift cards for essentials—or for a small treat.
- Invite them into your holidays.
- Ask if they need a break, and help make it happen.
- Help with care appointments—find providers, offer childcare, or contribute financially.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT: WHAT TO SAY (AND NOT SAY)

After a divorce, many people feel invisible—so words of encouragement matter more than ever. Encouragement isn’t about solving their problems or offering advice. It’s about reminding them that they’re seen and valued, and not forgotten by God.

We often feel pressure to cheer people up, but true comfort doesn’t sound like clichés or forced optimism. Proverbs 25:20 says, “Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.” Both images are jarring. Taking off your coat leaves you exposed, and vinegar on soda causes a small explosion—disruptive and messy. When someone is grieving, false cheer can feel the same way. Often, the most loving thing we can do is acknowledge what’s hard and stay with them in it.

Mutual encouragement strengthens both people. Don’t treat your friend like a project. If they invite you in, share your life too. Trust their wisdom and don’t assume their spiritual life is on pause.

Encouragement can come in many forms—meeting in person for a meal or a visit, sending a text or voice memo, mailing a card or writing a short note. One of the most meaningful things someone did for me was gathering encouraging notes from friends and compiling them in a small scrapbook. I'm pretty sure I wore out the binding on that as I paged through it on hard days.

We often wonder what to say—and what to avoid. Here are some suggestions:

WHAT TO SAY

- “This is devastatingly hard. It’s heartbreaking for me too, and I’m standing with you.”
- “You’re doing a great job. I see how you’re showing up and doing the hard work.” (Though be sensitive to whether your friend wants affirmation for being courageous and strong or the freedom to acknowledge they are anxious or angry.)
- “I noticed you did _____.” (Share something specific that you want to commend).

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- “At least...” (Any sentence that starts this way will likely feel minimizing or dismissive.)
- “Our friend went through this too—and her situation was worse.” (Comparison is not helpful.)
- “You should...” or “Have you tried...?” (Unsolicited advice often feels like veiled criticism.)

Don’t assume their divorce is a spiritual problem. You can encourage them to trust the Lord, but be sensitive as you do it. For more on this, see the church section.

USE ACTIVE LISTENING

One of the best ways to support someone is simply to show up and listen. Your friend needs a safe space to be honest, without judgment or quick answers. Listening means making space for grief—asking thoughtful questions, receiving their story with care, and resisting the urge to rush toward the bright side.

Job’s friends started well, sitting with him in silence for seven days because they saw how great his suffering was (Job 2:13). But when they spoke, they began to analyze and correct. Job responded, “Listen closely to what I’m saying. That’s one consolation you can give me” (Job 21:2-3, NLT) and, “Do you intend to rebuke my words, when the words of one in despair belong to the wind?” (6:26, NASB). In suffering, words aren’t always tidy. Let your friend speak freely. Some words are meant to be carried away by the wind.

HOW TO LISTEN WELL

- Give your full attention: Put away your phone. Don’t multitask. Make eye contact.
- Let silence linger. Your friend may need time to find the right words. Don’t rush them along.
- Affirm what they’re saying with words like “That sounds overwhelming” or “It makes sense that you feel that way.”
- Reflect what you hear by repeating or summarizing it. This can help your friend process their own thoughts.
- Ask follow-up questions. This isn’t to jump in with solutions but to go deeper on their train of thought.

- Listen again next week and the week after that. Grief takes repetition—and that’s okay.

CAUTIONS WHILE LISTENING

- Don’t interrupt with your own stories or comparisons.
- Don’t minimize their pain by trying to move them forward too fast.
- Some people process internally and may not want to talk while others may offer a cascade of words. Honor both.
- Don’t ask for details they haven’t offered.

PRAY

Prayer isn’t what we do when we’ve run out of options—it’s the most important and powerful thing we can offer. It brings the needs of our friend to the only one who can truly help. Before anything else, begin here.

Start by praying for yourself. Ask God for wisdom, strength, compassion, and the faith to trust that he’s working, even when you can’t see it. Pray that you won’t shrink back from what God is calling you to or take on what he hasn’t called you to. It’s easy to say we’ll pray and never do it, so build it into your day. Perhaps set a timer for three minutes and pray specifically for your friend. You might be surprised by how much you can cover in just three focused minutes.

You can pray that your friend would be protected from shame, fear, bitterness, and isolation; that their children would experience comfort and stability; that practical needs would be met; and that God’s presence would feel near. Praying Scripture is especially powerful. Try inserting your friend’s name into a verse, which could look like this: “Lord, would you supply every need of Jordan’s according to your riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Other helpful passages to pray include Isaiah 41:10, Joshua 1:9, Psalm 34:18, Romans 15:13, and Psalm 23:1–3.

Ask your friend specifically, “How can I pray for you?” and pray right then if they’re open to it. You might even set up a time to pray weekly, either alone or with a few trusted friends.

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE THROUGH PRAYER

- Text a verse you’re praying so they can join you in it.
- Name the specific needs you’re lifting up.
- Take a picture of a Bible passage you’re praying over them and text it.
- Pray a psalm of lament together—like Psalm 13 or 142. As outlined in chapter 2, read a few verses, and then follow the psalmist’s model, starting with complaint, moving to requests, and ending in trust.

PART 2: FOR THE CHURCH

BE WELCOMING

The church should be one of the safest, most supportive places for people walking through any kind of pain, including divorce. But that's not always the case. Too often individuals and families feel forgotten, judged, unsure of whether and how they belong. As the body of Christ, we're called to pursue the hurting, help carry their burdens, and care for people in crisis.

Here are four ways church members can show up for people through and after divorce. In each, there are suggestions for church members first and then for pastors or lay leaders.

1. MAKE YOUR CHURCH A PLACE OF WELCOME AND COMPASSION

As with individuals, the most meaningful support the church can offer is often to simply be there for divorced people. We aren't their Savior. We can't solve all their problems, deepen their faith, or change them. But we can walk beside them, offer what we are called to, and trust God with the rest.

If you see someone sitting alone in church, sit with them or invite them to sit with you. Initiate a conversation. Invite them to lunch after service if you can or follow up with them later. And if they reach out for coffee or a phone call, please say yes. They probably already feel vulnerable asking, and rejection likely feels all the harder now. Encourage hospitality teams to notice those sitting alone and take the initiative to reach out.

Most divorced people feel vulnerable walking into church. They are often carrying more than grief—there's shame, fear, regret, anger, and deep questions about identity and belonging. Divorce can make people feel judged or pushed to the margins of the church, but you can counter that by showing up, listening without assumptions, and inviting them into real community. You don't need to know the whole backstory to invite someone to Bible study or out for coffee—your kindness can make all the difference in their view of the church. Anna Meade Harris writes:

*"We often don't welcome divorced families with open arms, but rather with a whole lot of questions. While there is a moral dimension to divorce, we must not take it on ourselves to figure out what happened to the marriage and why."*²

She suggests leading with invitation rather than investigation, which often closes the door before people have had the chance to step in. Instead of asking, "What happened in your marriage?" try "How has divorce affected you?"

If you're a church leader and know members who've walked through divorce, ask if they'd be willing to connect with someone who is early in the process. You could keep a quiet list of "divorce mentors"—trusted men and women who aren't professional counselors, but who have experienced God's faithfulness and are open to meeting one-on-one. When someone new shares that they're going through divorce, you might simply say, "Would it help to talk with someone who's been there?" That kind of connection can make a world of difference.

Be willing to sit with survivors of abuse and offer support as they begin to process what's happened to them or their children. Abuse is a painful and complex issue, but it's one the church must be willing to step into with both compassion and care. As counseling pastor and author Brad Hambrick, says, "Most counseling mistakes arise from the questions we don't ask."³ In these

² Anna Meade Harris, *God's Grace for Every Family: Biblical Encouragement for Single Parent Families and The Churches That Seek to Love Them Well* (Zondervan, 2024), p. 24.

³ Ed. Brad Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused* (B&H, 2019), p. 21.

situations, asking thoughtful questions and offering steady presence matters deeply. I echo Rachael Denhollander's words:

*"My prayer for you is that the depth and beauty of the gospel is made increasingly more real, and that you begin to both feel the enormous weight of ministering to the wounded, and also the incredible hope you can be equipped to bring."*⁴

2. POINT PEOPLE TO THE LORD WITHOUT BEING PRESCRIPTIVE

Divorce often creates a spiritual crisis. Some feel abandoned by God; others wonder if they still belong in church. It's a season when faith may deepen or unravel. It is the church's role to offer compassion and comfort as members walk through grief and questions. As Jude 22 reminds us, we are to "have mercy on those who doubt."

Much of suffering remains a mystery this side of heaven, and Scripture invites us to weep with those who weep, rather than trying to explain away their grief. Divorce is especially tender territory, and well-intended attempts to make sense of someone's pain often feel dismissive. Even Scripture, when used like a hammer, can hurt rather than heal. Instead of offering verses as answers, share how they met you in your own pain, briefly and with humility. Saying, "This verse ministered to me when I was struggling—it may not help you, but I wonder if it might" is very different from "Here's what you need to believe."

If it feels appropriate, consider inviting someone walking through divorce to a prayer time, Bible study, or reading plan. Let them ask questions and express doubts without rushing to answer them. Lament (introduced in chapter 2) may be especially meaningful—praying a psalm of lament together can give voice to grief while anchoring hope.

Don't assume that someone going through divorce has less to offer spiritually. Pastors and leaders may want to look for ways to include divorced members in meaningful service—not only after they've "healed" but as they walk with God in real time. This may be a time of growth and deep dependence on God. Consider gently affirming how their experience might encourage others.

3. HELP SHEPHERD THE CHILDREN

Some of the most damaging fallout from divorce is felt by children, who often blame themselves but rarely receive direct care. The church has a powerful opportunity to support these young people, not by singling them out but by consistently showing up in their lives. That simple act reminds them that the church isn't just for intact families—it's for them too.

Single parents often feel that the full weight of their children's futures and faith rests on their shoulders. As one friend told me:

"My divorce is one thing. But the effect of divorce on my kids? That's what keeps me up at night."

One of the best ways to support single parents is to pay attention to their children. One mom said:

"Every time someone greets my child by name, it reminds me we're not invisible. It reminds me I'm not raising them completely alone."

One way to help carry the load for single parents is to offer to pray regularly and specifically for one child.

Children grieve differently than adults. Their pain may look like acting out, withdrawing, or pretending they're fine. Be compassionate and supportive, considering their needs rather than seeing them as burdens or problems. One family regularly invited my daughters to dinner and made them feel seen. Years later they still talk about it. It wasn't flashy, but it made them feel like they belonged.

⁴ As above, p. 14.

Here are some practical ways to care: learn their names, make a point of saying hello, and ask about their lives. Invite them into your home for dinner.⁵ Offer rides to school or practice, or help coordinate a small team to rotate. Cheer them on at games, concerts, or recitals. Help with homework, school projects, or college applications when you can. Small acts of presence can speak louder than any program. Even something as small as taking them for ice cream once a month can mean the world. For teens especially, a steady mentor can make a lasting difference. If you can't be that person, try to connect them with someone who can.

If you're in youth ministry, keep an eye out for students navigating divorce at home. Their families may look different from others in the group, and they may feel out of place. Take time to meet with them individually and connect them with peers or mentors who will stay present. They need to know they matter and that others will stay, even when things feel hard. Showing up for them now could shape how they see God for years to come.

4. HAVE A PLAN TO HELP WITH NEEDS

While the church often responds quickly to crises like illness or loss, it can fall silent when a family breaks apart. Divorce is often complex—the fallout stretching over months or years—and it rarely comes with a clear end date. Legal battles, court dates, childcare struggles, financial stress, and emotional fallout can accumulate quickly. Often, people in the church simply don't know how to help.

That's why intentional care from the church matters so much. One of the most practical ways to offer support is by forming a care team to help carry the load. My pastor did that for me, dividing tasks among friends who could offer rides, fix computer issues, make repairs, or commit to pray. (See the "O" section for friends on pages 162-163.)

Ideally, someone in leadership—whether a pastor, elder, deacon, men's or women's ministry leader, or discipleship director—should take the lead in caring for divorced members. Needs will vary: some may be looking for work, others might benefit from intentional mentoring, and many will face one-time or ongoing financial challenges. Since most people won't feel comfortable asking for help, it's a tremendous gift when the church initiates those conversations.

Practical obstacles like lack of childcare or transportation, or cost often prevent single parents from participating in church events. Ask what would make it easier for single parents to attend and consider how your church can help remove those barriers. More broadly, many divorced individuals feel they no longer fit in. Churches can shift that by creating low-pressure, relational environments—like shared meals or informal gatherings—where people of all backgrounds can connect without feeling out of place.

Support doesn't have to look the same in every church. As Anna Meade Harris writes:

*"A very small congregation in rural Iowa probably will not have the personnel or finances (or need) to construct an entire program of support for single parents, but it might be able to keep a notebook in the church office where members can catalog the kinds of help they can offer. Or a well-organized lay leader can connect helpers with families, which also helps members grow in relationship and affection ... the challenge for the larger congregation is developing true friendship between members so that help does not become more transactional than relational."*⁶

Some elements of a care plan could include...

- offering benevolence funds for upcoming bills, counseling, legal help, children's school

⁵ In any way that you seek to support children who are in this position, make sure you know and are following legal guidelines and the safeguarding policies your church has in place, and that you are being wise in the way you interact with children and youth who are in a vulnerable place emotionally.

⁶ Anna Meade Harris, *God's Grace for Every Family*, p. 128.

needs, or childcare.

- keeping a list of trusted Christian counselors, lawyers, and mediators.
- pairing single parents with small groups or families for ongoing support.
- connecting newly divorced individuals with others who have walked through divorce—whether for regular mentoring or just a one-time conversation.
- distributing the “How the Church Can Help” form to better understand and meet people’s needs.
- designating a point person (in leadership or lay ministry) to follow up and regularly check on updated needs and to coordinate help.
- offering peer-support groups. If the church isn’t equipped to lead one, be familiar with trustworthy groups like DivorceCare (see if that’s hosted in your area) and refer people there proactively. Consider hosting it if there’s interest.

The most important thing is not having a perfect plan—it’s having a plan at all. Being proactive says, “You’re not alone. You’re still part of us. We care.”

I know how hard it is to know what to say or do when someone you care about is walking through divorce. That’s why I wrote this appendix—not to give a formula but to offer a few practical ways in which you can come alongside someone in a vulnerable time. Small things make a big difference. I pray that through you, they’ll glimpse the kindness and faithfulness of Jesus.



Taken from: This Was Never the Plan | © Vaneetha Rendall Risner, 2026

Published by The Good Book Company | ISBN: 9781802544145

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