

Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart
By Kenneth C. Haugk, Ph.D.

Kenneth Haugk is the founder of Stephen Ministry. Although this book is not one of the teaching texts for training Stephen Ministers, many have incorporated it into their training programs.

The title is based on Proverbs 25:20 which says, "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sing songs to a heavy heart."

This book was based on research involving more than four thousand people who had gone through suffering brought on by loss of some type in their lives. Indeed, Dr. Haugk's wife was dying from cancer and, between the two of them, they compiled a treasure of wisdom to be used when providing care for those with a heavy heart.

We have a tendency to tell people to get back in the saddle, dry your tears, count your blessings, be brave! Lou Gehrig was so brave that he stood before a packed crowd in Yankee Stadium and said how lucky he was. Guess what? I'm not Lou Gehrig! Or we might tell someone to have more patience and refer them to the story about Job. Thanks, but no thanks; I'm not Job.

Each individual's suffering is uniquely difficult and can't be compared to any other person's experience. You may not be able to know exactly how the other person feels, but you can validate his/her feelings and make your presence known. When a suffering person describes how he feels, believe what you hear and communicate your belief. You can't be that person and truly feel what he feels, but you can believe what he says. It's important for the hurting person to know that people believe his pain is real.

Dr. Haugk tells us what to say and what to not say. After you've said "Hello", don't say, "How are you?" Of course, the answer will always be, "I'm fine." Rather say, "It's good to see you. Fill me in. What's the latest?" Don't talk too much about your own experiences, focus on the person at hand. Follow the other person's lead and let them set the pace. Forget about yourself and your own needs. Don't share experiences of others with someone in pain. Most cliches and catch-phrases are shallow and detract from your caring effort.

This review barely scratches the surface of a wonderful book that all Christians should read. It helps you bring Christ to the table.

Mike Slayter