

From the Heart. . .

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



New Year . . . New Beginnings

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 1, 2016)

Isn't it wonderful that on the first day of the new year we can actually make a choice to have new beginnings? I much prefer to use "new beginnings" rather than "new year resolutions." It somehow helps me take small but important steps toward being resolute about any number of needed changes and commitments.

What new beginnings do you want to start in 2016? I know a couple friends who decided to step out and start a new business. Another friend is starting to be more kind to those who are not so kind. For myself, with all that is going on in this troubling world, I am finding ways to make someone else's life a little easier and more hopeful.

Didn't Jesus say, "The poor you will always have with you?" So, that means we all can simply look around us in our own neighborhoods to bring hope to their lives. Let's do our part in 2016. With the recent weather that has caused much damage and has taken lives in Texas, there are many ways to help others. Here are a few resources to support and volunteer to

bring relief to the devastating damage and loss of life in the Dallas and surrounding areas. Ongoing help is also still needed for those affected by damages throughout 2015.

<http://www.redcross.org/local/tx/centralandsouthtexas>

<https://safeandwell.communityos.org/cms/index.php>

<http://www.donateacar.com/texas-charities/garland-texas-charities/>

<https://www.facebook.com/raysofhopesmwarehouse/timeline>

<http://kxan.com/2015/12/24/flood-survivors-furniture-warehouse-running-low-on-donations/>

<http://www.taxexemptworld.com/organizations/kendall-county-tx-texas.asp>

<http://www.txnp.org/>

Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared a disaster for the four Texas counties hit the hardest: Dallas, Rockwall, Collin, and Ellis counties. So, check out any resources within those counties that may need your support and volunteer help.

<http://www.dallascounty.org/>

<http://www.rockwallcountytexas.com/>

<http://www.collincountytx.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

<http://co.ellis.tx.us/>

May 2016 shine as one of the most giving and heartfelt years for all those close to home and in our nation. Happy New Year to all!

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



How do we know where we belong?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 8, 2016)

I was wondering with the beginning of my eleventh year writing my “*From the Heart*” byline, what could I offer in lifeskills for today that I haven’t already over the years. I even thought about retiring my byline as much as I love writing and sharing with you, my reader friends.

As I was sitting in front of my computer staring at a blank page, that’s when a friend sent me a text message that reflected her deep desire to find her place in life and to contribute to others in a purposeful and fulfilling way for both. Basically, where do I belong? And how do I get there?

What simple but profound questions for us all! Possibly one of the most important questions to help ourselves is “What is most important to me?” When we declare what is most important, we will be on the path to recommitting to our core values and building relationships that support our values. Yet, for most of us, we get so busy with daily responsibilities and circumstances that happen right in front of us. We eventually lose sight of what is most important to us. We often assume we don’t have control over

our circumstances. With some situations, not having control may be the case. However, we are always in control of our responses to those circumstances. Once we refocus on what is most important, we begin to make steps toward getting where we belong. So, let's revisit this place where you belong.

What is most important to you? Be specific. Declare it right now. Write it down. Tell a family member or close trusted friend. Have a conversation about how what is most important to you is reflected in what you do every day. If you find yourself getting internal hints that you may not be in a place you belong, maybe it's time to dig deeper? Keep in mind, life comes in seasons.

As Henry Cloud, well known clinical psychologist, author and speaker, is quoted saying, "Everything has seasons, and we have to be able to recognize when something's time has passed and be able to move into the next season. Everything that is alive requires pruning as well, which is a great metaphor for endings."

There will be seasons where you belong exactly where you are. Then another season says hello and is hinting you may need to consider some changes. Only you will know how much to prune in your life in order to move into that next season where you belong.

Moving into our next season always involves not just our core values but our relationships. What about the people who surrounds you each day? How do those people support your values and any changes you want to make? Write down the names of those who you know for sure will fit where you belong now or in your next season. You may want to have a conversation with that person you believe fits or will fit. Whatever happens in that conversation, you just may find out if that person is a real fit not only for you but also for them.

Such conversations are always an unknown but can be a positive, constructive means to discover more about where you are and where you want to head. Your partner in the conversation will undoubtedly gain some insight into their own journey and seasons. You both will then be able to help each other find where you both belong, whether you say goodbye or renew your hellos. And having a prayer conversation with God never hurts. Keep me posted on your adventure settling in where you belong in 2016.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Relationships that Last Forever

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 15, 2016)

What qualities do you see in a relationship that lasts forever? We all know those qualities can vary depending on the type of relationship and your core values that encourage you to find relationships that supports what is most important to you.

For me, some of the qualities at the top of my list is kindness, wisdom, and someone who sees the good in any situation. According to Alice Boyes Ph.D., *50 Characteristics of Healthy Relationships, What you know and like about your partner should tell you a lot* (Psychology Today, posted January 22, 2013), the first one on her list is "You can name your partner's best friend and identify a positive quality that the person has." She goes on to list many others, such as playfulness, think about each other often, enthusiastic for you, name your spouse's/partner's favorite books, sense of security.

Here are some qualities most commonly thought of for a spouse, a friend, even a co-worker.

- You are committed to offering communication with love, and genuine listening from the heart
- You work at a balanced relationship where the two of you mutually support each other

- You genuinely care for the other person
- You have an honest, open relationship
- You are faithful in the good times and the bad times
- You respect one another even when you disagree
- Give you both time and opportunity to work through problems together
- You have lots of fun together
- You simply enjoy just being around each other
- You forgive one another
- Be truly who you are with each other

Have any others you can think of? Give yourself some time to reflect. Then talk with your spouse, friend, or co-workers about the positive qualities you see in them and in your relationship with them. Give yourself time to reflect on ways you want to improve your behavior with your spouse, friend, co-worker that will build a stronger relationships that potentially last forever.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart. . .

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Relationships . . . Saying Your Final Goodbye, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 22, 2016)

Earlier this week my sister, Paula, said goodbye to a dear friend who passed away from a long battle with cancer. Her friend was one of the most resilient of friends during her time with us. Only those who have made the cancer journey could ever understand more fully the depth and courage required to fight the good fight.

No matter whether a person wins the battle here or wins it on the other side, how do you say goodbye to a dear friend? What do you say before they are gone? How has your own life and faith been challenged? How do you share your love and faith while they are still with you?

These are just a few questions that came to mind for my sister as she walked with her friend through the years. Right now, Paula is recuperating from nine long, committed months caring for her friend. Yet, she would be glad to share her thought in the next article. With my sister's experience being so fresh on her mind and heart, I felt these questions would be best answered by her as well. We will hear what she gained from knowing this special person called, Lydia.

In the meantime, I offer some perspective on my sister's journey and my own final goodbyes to loved ones over the years. With the question, "How did I say goodbye to my dear friend?", my sister chronicled many opportunities to say goodbye. In the

beginning, Paula hung on to trusting, believing, hoping for a miracle healing. As the months, weeks, and days grew nearer with Lydia becoming more increasingly weak and unable to function, my sister also grew weary and even more sad about the fate of her friend.

For myself, I remember the time caring for my husband's mother, Mary, as she became increasingly weak from Leukemia in her senior years. I remember my friend, Nancy, fighting melanoma cancer, as I sat by her bedside having chats about family, faith, and friends. During that phase of time for both, I too was trusting, believing, and hoping for a miracle healing. I do know they happen, because I know those who have experienced it. My own journey to wellness also reflects that evidence. Yet, every person's journey is unique to them in many ways. So, none of us would presume to say goodbye prematurely, that's for sure.

With the next question, "What do you say before they are gone?", it seems we tend in the early stages to talk at length with our friend about what she is going through and any resources that may help her. As your friend gets closer to passing, it often gets quieter, and even sometimes, more distant. For some, such as my sister Paula, she stepped right in to be one of the caregivers helping everyone to get along, be practical, organized, and bring some comfort and peace into the situation.

Although not as much as my sister, I too tried to be there for Mary and Nancy whenever I could. My own health challenges during those times prevented me from helping as much as I wanted. Yet, I had many opportunities to tell them how much I loved them, particularly Mary since she moved into our home during her final days.

What do you say in the final days and hours? I remember often repeating to Mary and Nancy how important they are in my life and how much impact they have had. In Mary's final hours, she could no longer speak or be conscious. I simply was there by her side thanking God for her and asking to give her peace in her passing or raise her up on this side of heaven healed and healthy. For Nancy, I wasn't able to see her in her final hours. Yet, a few days earlier she called to say goodbye and thank me for being her friend. In so many ways that phone call was one of the hardest moments to process. It felt so final, with tear running down my face.

Then comes the question, "How has my own life and faith been challenged?" There is never a doubt that one's life is forever changed watching and even being present when a dear friend passes away. Lydia was surrounded by many who loved her every day during the final months and hours. Paula was one among the many who loved and cared for her.

I know my life has forever changed because of those dear ones who went on before me. Life has become so precious, and every moment is a gift to be cherished. I've learned to love more deeply and laugh loudly in life whenever I get a chance.

Another but surely not the final question is "How do you share your love and faith while they are still with you?" Words to your friend can be comforting and welcomed. However, often when the time is close, words go quiet, understandably. That is when you simply are there loving them. Isn't that what the heart of faith is all about . . . being there? Being there can mean many things. Yet, when you become a caregiver, you step up with whatever is necessary.

The list can be long . . . from bringing groceries, making meals, reading to her, cleaning the house, even washing your friend's body because she can't. You do whatever it takes to share your love and faith and in whatever way you can. I have many times watched my sister reach out to help others over the years, including our own mother and other family members. For her friend Lydia, this was a exceptionally special and exhausting time for my sister. Yet, her heart was fully committed to her friend.

In the next article, Paula will share her own thoughts and responses to these "saying goodbye" questions of life and loving a friend. For Paula and the many loved ones who said goodbye, her friend, Lydia, is now free, walking and singing with the angels. And this goodbye isn't really final for those with faith in God . . . knowing Lydia and her friends will see many again on the other side.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart. . .

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Relationships . . . Saying Your Final Goodbye, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 29, 2016)

Here we are again, learning how to say goodbye, even our final goodbyes. In the previous article I shared about my sister, Paula, saying goodbye to a dear friend who passed away from a long battle with cancer. Her friend was one of the most resilient of friends during her time with us. Only those who have made the cancer journey could ever understand more fully the depth and courage required to fight the good fight.

No matter whether a person wins the battle here or wins it on the other side, how do you say goodbye to a dear friend? What do you say before they are gone? What do you say in the final days and hours? How has your own life and faith been challenged? How do you share your love and faith while they are still with you?

In the previous article, I shared my perspective on these questions as I witnessed my sister walking with her friend through the years. Right now, Paula is recuperating from nine long, committed months caring for her friend. Yet, she has offered to share her thoughts in part 2 of this article. With my sister's experience being so fresh on her mind and heart, I felt these questions would be best answered by her as well. Let's hear what she gained from knowing this special person called, Lydia.

First, Paula wanted to say this about her friend, Lydia. "My friend fought cancer for 5 1/2 years through surgeries, radiation, years of chemo all while holding down a full

time job and volunteer positions. She was the strongest woman I have ever known with great beauty inside and out, an amazing mind and memory, a beautiful voice, multi-lingual - a woman of many gifts.”

With the first two questions, “How do you say goodbye to a dear friend?” and “What do you say before they are gone?” Paula reflected over her friend’s final months, wondering what else could she do? Here is her response. “Yet, what could we do? The answer is simple – be there, show up, sit with her, share your heart with her, be real. No placating words were spoken as they were meaningless. Showing up wasn’t always easy. Leaving my husband for a few days every week left household chores, maintenance and upkeep on my home front in disarray. Little got done for nine months. Yet I looked forward to going until the last month or so as she began to deteriorate more, pain management was difficult to maintain, and she became difficult to be around at times. That was the time that commitment, faith and love were challenged the most. My other friends who didn’t know Lydia, supported and encouraged me to keep showing up.”

Then comes the next question, What do you say in the final days and hours? In the midst of witnessing Lydia’s final days and hours, Paula struggled with her own thoughts of wanting to stay home. Wasn’t what she had done enough? In Paula’s word, “I was appalled at myself for wanting to stay home. I did continue to visit regularly and was privileged to spend the last 3 1/2 hours of her life with her and share this prayer with her – ‘Come Lord Jesus and take my friend home.’ I spoke that phrase several times over the course of that afternoon telling her how much she is loved, what she

meant in my life and then putting her in charge of celebratory reunions when her friends and family join her in heaven.”

With the last two questions but surely not the final ones to ponder, “How has your own life and faith been challenged?” and “How do you share your love and faith while they are still with you?” Paula reflected, “In getting to know her over the years, I have come to understand that exterior beauty is not always a blessing as it brings unwanted attention, and in her case abuse. It was a struggle to stay alive yet she managed to give to others throughout her life. So to see her continue to struggle and endure much pain in her cancer battle was especially difficult for her friends and family.”

Upon Lydia final hours Paula closes her thoughts here about her very special friend. “Lydia liked the song, *A Bridge Over Troubled Water* – I played it for her. She was often the bridge for me in gaining understanding of the trials of my life, giving me perspective, and helping me to connect the root causes of a situation with my response. She was an amazing lady, loved and respected by many and will be missed for the rest of my life. Most importantly, she will continue to inspire and motivate me to make a difference in others’ lives the way she did throughout her life.”

If you are struggling to know what to do for a dear friend like Lydia, I hope this two-part article helped you gain comfort and understanding on how to be there for your friend in whatever way you can. And most of all, dear reader, if you are struggling and taking a journey like Lydia was, I pray you too will have friends like my sister at your side loving you and caring for you.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.