

In the right place at the right time, help arrives

Timothy Armbruster | Sep. 1, 2009



(Margaret Scott)

Ministries

Ten o'clock one night, the on-call phone rang.

"Father?"

"Yes?"

"I need to speak to Shane."

I didn't know who was calling or why. I tried to explain I didn't know a Shane and there was no one on staff by that name. Disgruntled, the lady hung up. The next morning I got another call, from another person asking for Shane. This person tried to explain the situation. He started by telling me his story.

He was a young man in a rough patch in his life. He had been struggling. He had tried to commit suicide. He was on the verge of homelessness. One day he left home, walking with no particular destination in mind. Four hours later, tired, he sat on the curb by a stop sign. He felt like he was at the end of something. Suicide was again on his mind.

Shane drove up beside him, saw him through the open window and asked if he was all right. He didn't really respond, but Shane persisted. Shane reached into his back seat and grabbed a paper bag. It was a survivor pack that our youth group had assembled a few weeks earlier that contained bottled water, some food and a card with the name of our parish and the parish phone number. Shane handed the bag to the man on the curb and said he hoped everything would be all right. Then Shane drove off.

Thoughts of suicide left the young man, and he walked back to his grandmother's home and told her the story.

It was the grandmother who had called first. She was convinced that Shane had saved her grandson's life, and she wanted to thank him. I talked to the young man and then the grandmother, slowly piecing more of the story together. He was 22. His mother had passed away a year ago, his father never wanted anything to do with him,

and he had been living with his grandmother. His grandmother's health had begun to decline, and she was moving into an assisted living facility where he could not stay with her. He had hit rock bottom and thought no one cared. He attempted to take his own life by slicing his wrist. At the sight of the blood, he freaked and called out for help. He was rushed to the hospital and the bleeding was stopped. It was a week or so after that when he went for the walk and met Shane.

I made a few more phone calls, located Shane, one of our adult volunteers who works with the confirmation and youth programs, and got him in touch with the young man. After talking with Shane, the young man called me back and we agreed to meet and talk some more.

I spent the afternoon with him. We went to lunch, a movie and a walk. I heard more of his life story. I heard about his struggles, but also of his accomplishments. Although his life was not easy, it still had value. He realized he had screwed up and wanted to get his life back on track. He wanted to find a job and earn some money and take care of himself.

Feeling frustrated and concerned, I just wanted to say, "Wake up kid and see what you got going for you." But I refrained and just let him speak. We talked about prayer, and I encouraged the young man to talk freely with God. I said something like God could handle our frankness and I cried out, to illustrate my point, "What do you want now God?"

The young man looked at me a bit frightened and asked, "Is that how easy it is to talk to God?"

I said, "Yeah, it's just that easy. Just as you and I are sitting here talking to each other, that's just how easy it is to talk to God. But the challenge is, when God responds, will we hear God?" Talking to God, expressing what is on our mind and in our heart is easy. The difficult part is hearing the answer.

He said, "You know, when I was walking, I kept thinking, 'I wish someone would help me,' and you know what, that's when Shane stopped. Do you think that was God answering my prayer?"

Choking back tears, I told him, "Yeah, that was God. You just needed to be in the right place at the right time for the right thing to happen. It took you four hours to get there, but that's where God wanted you to be."

The next day, I called around to different agencies, seeking help for this young man. I know the runaround a person can sometimes get when calling for help. I made several pages of notes with phone numbers and contacts and passed these notes onto the young man, saying, "Now it's up to you."

He called a week or so later telling me all that he had discovered and who could help him. He ended the call by saying, "I guess someone really does care about me." All I could think was, "Hell yeah, kid, we do!"

As I shared this story, others asked me, "How could this happen?" I have no answer why. All I know is that when we lose our direction or feel no one cares, we may feel we have no one to turn to. Then what we should do is stop and pray. Listen and pray. Breathe and pray. So in the middle of all this, I found myself crying out to God, "Help me, help him!" and he did.

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