

In 2013 I took a sabbatical to work on my thesis for my doctor of ministry degree. The topic I wrote about was spiritual friendship, specifically among clergy. But spiritual friendship is not limited to any particular group. All of us need people we can call spiritual friends, who can point us to God and help us grow in our relationship with God.

One such friend for writer Bob Greene was his friend Jack Roth. Greene wrote a wonderful book celebrating his friendship with him, a relationship that dated back to kindergarten for the two men. The memoir arose from Jack's diagnosis with cancer, which would ultimately claim his life. The book is *And You Know You Should Be Glad: A True Story of Lifelong Friendship* and is published by William Morrow (an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers). I heartily recommend it.

In the course of his illness Jack and his wife attended a support group. After the first meeting Jack called Bob. Bob could tell that something was bothering his friend.

"Then he said it:

'Greene, I just felt so bad for them.'

I thought I might have misheard.

'Bad for who?' I said.

'Those people in the group,' he said.

'But aren't they going through the same thing you are?' I said.

'They're much worse off,' he said. 'They've all had it longer. Some of them have had these really serious operations – some of them had to be assisted into the room, and really seemed to be in a lot of pain. My heart was just breaking for them.'

That is why he had called. Not because he was feeling sad for himself. Not because he saw his own future when he looked at them. Jack had cancer of the worse kind, he knew that death was on its way, yet all he could think about was the hurt being endured by the strangers with whom he had spent the evening.

'You see something like that, and you just wish there was something you could do to help,' he said." (p. 211).

What a testament to one man's generous and loving spirit! I hope that if I were in a similar place that my thoughts would be focused on others and their suffering and what I could do to help them. And what a gift of friendship to share that with Bob, both the pain and the hope.

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24) I've wondered about that verse, but I can see it in this story about Jack. By forgetting his own pain and reaching out to others, he bore fruit, not least because of the impact he made on his friend Bob who shared it with so many others.

I pray that you have at least one spiritual friend in your life, someone who points you toward God and helps you grow in your relationship with God in big and little ways.