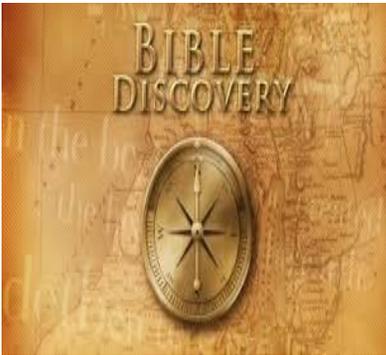


Bearing Each Other's Burdens

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." ⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.



Picture for a moment a brother or sister struggling under the load of anxiety and worry; they long to be free from their burden. It doesn't help them if we merely explain their anxiety is due to unbelief or that they're sinning in their anxiousness. Even if that's true (*and who are we to judge?*), what they deeply need is sympathy and understanding, someone to come alongside of them and encourage them. Again, consider another without the basic necessities – clothing, food, and housing. "What good will it do them if you say, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed', but do nothing to help them?" Of course those words are the point James 2:15-16 makes - **that it does no good at all!** The old adage goes something like this, "it does no good when a friend is up to their neck in alligators to remind them they should have drained the swamp."

If we aren't willing to approach those in need showing we care, willingly helping them with *our deeds*, willingly carrying the burdens of those weaker, they'll never be able to receive our exhortation for finding strength in Christ, standing on faith, trusting in God. Without lifting their burden, lightening their load, supporting them; any attempt to bring them to a standard of behaviour above what they're handling in their dilemma is useless. Truth without mercy, fact without fairness, honesty without compassion was characteristic of the Pharisees – **not Christ**. Don't be like the Pharisees. Jesus said, "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." [Matthew 23:4]

A brother or sister struggling under heavy burdens whether physical, financial, emotional or otherwise and whether of their own doing or something thrust upon them through circumstance *is simply unable* to carry his or her own burden. Yes, it may include weakness that prevents overcoming sin in their lives. Yes, it may mean they're not even interested in victory. What good does it do to be angry? What good does it do to quote scripture after scripture condemning them? When someone's already feeling defeated, worn down, broken – when their spiritual walk isn't all *you think* it should be – our belittling them and leaving them to struggle doesn't reflect their weakness, **it only shows we're weak ourselves.**

**Truth without mercy,
fact without fairness,
honesty without
compassion was
characteristic of the
Pharisees – not Christ.**

Each of us has experienced times when burdens are too big to bear. We didn't have enough strength, courage, resources or knowledge to carry the load – **we needed help!** Denying ourselves now to do for others

**...belittling
them and
leaving them
to struggle doesn't reflect
their weakness ~ it only
shows we're weak!**



what they can't do for themselves is simply extending Christ's sacrificial love shown to us by others. It's remembering Christ gave Himself for us when we couldn't get ourselves out of sin's deathly trap – Christ died for our sins, redeemed us; set us free. That's why Paul, who truly understood Christ's forgiveness from a personal point of view, could write, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." [vs. 3] Paul knew Jesus had taken his burdens; that all the insults thrown by "Saul" during his campaign against the followers of Christ had landed squarely on the shoulders of Christ. Heartbroken, Paul knew he was forgiven.

We all depend on others. Therefore it becomes our calling to consider who's helped us carry our burdens during our trials. In return we're not called to increase burdens but to lighten them for others. Again and again in scripture we encounter God's plea as members of God's family to *help each other grow in the faith; to bear each other's burdens*. We're instructed to "*encourage one another*", to "*build each other up*" [1 Thessalonians 5:11] and to "*be patient, bearing with one another in love.*" [Ephesians 4:2] How dare we miss such an impassioned call from our Heavenly Father to step out in faith to serve one another in love rather than simple duty, to meet the need of our brothers and sisters in the faith with compassion sharing the wonder of God's amazing grace? Pastor John Piper suggests,

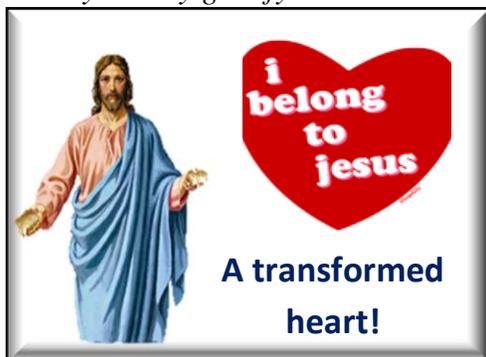
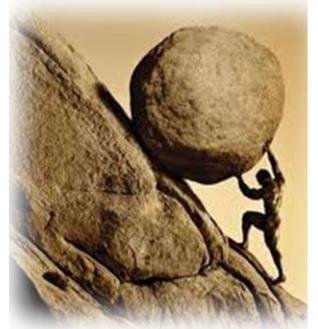
"Some of you wonder what you are supposed to do with your life. Here is a vocation that will bring you more satisfaction than if you became a millionaire ten times over: Develop the extraordinary skill for detecting the burdens of others and devote yourself daily to making them lighter." [The Law of Christ Aug 14/83]

Piper also states, "Pride, or self-exaltation, or self-reliance is the one virus that causes all the moral diseases of the world." Why else would Paul write asking we have spiritual unity, warning us such unity comes from God who gives us endurance and encouragement so we will be of one heart and encourage one another? It's a reminder to me – and hopefully to you – that none of us has any reason to boast; rather our hope comes from what's been given to us, pointing us to Christ.

The thrust of Paul's argument then is if a brother or sister is weighed down, menaced by some burden or threat, we're to be alert so we can act quickly coming alongside, giving a caring hand rather than letting them be crushed and destroyed.

Two things come from this...

- (1) It's remembering as Christians we can and do have burdens beyond which we can bear. Jesus promises "*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" [John 16:33] We're also promised and have confidence that, "*No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.*" [1 Corinthians 10:13 (MSG)] What I want you to consider is that we all face burdens at one time another, that God often uses our brothers and sisters to help us come through it – and *because of those experiences* we're then equipped to help our brothers and sisters when they're faced with great burdens.
- (2) Secondly, perhaps a siren's going off in your mind because you're saying some people have problems arise which they carry as their "boulders", as daily loads to be admired for their sacrificial living and refuse help; or as if their "daily loads" are boulders they don't deserve and they shouldn't have to do anything to overcome their problems. In each instance the result is perpetual pain, irresponsibility and unnecessary suffering. Displaying the red badge of courage or retreating from the reality of our problems doesn't solve anything. Remember Paul's admonishment "*that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"



These points draw us to our walk in Christ, humbly relying on His strength, His direction. What Christ has accomplished is to give us a transformed heart "*in order to bring praise to God.*" [vs. 7] *In our walk with Christ we're equipped* for bearing each other's burdens.

Matthew Henry's commentary fittingly reminds us, "*Christian liberty was allowed, not for our pleasure, but for the glory of God, and the good of others.*" We can only do this through the presence of Christ's Spirit in us. While the world can provide a spirit of charity; it takes the children of God stepping out on the hard road to pursue the cross of Christ.

This road we're called to walk...

1. **Takes the cross-demonstrating road.** Look back at verses 1 & 2 of our passage. Paul instructs “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.*” Again we see that selfishness has no place in the Christian life nor does pandering to another’s wicked will or humouring their sinful ways. Paul never intends that we continually give in to a weak brother or sister in their desires. Rather we’re called to act in a way which will be to his lasting benefit. Like a parent who knows when to say “no” for the good of a child.
2. **Follows the Christ-displaying road.** We’re reminded “*even Christ did not please himself*” - He lived to please His Heavenly Father and to serve, helping others. He didn’t die for the strong, the well-adjusted, the religiously superior but for those who needed a physician – the broken-hearted, the sick, the lonely, the troubled, those in prison, those without hope. He healed the maimed, the blind, the palsied and the deaf who could do nothing to aid themselves. How paltry then is any inconvenience we may face because of the weak brother in the church compared to what Christ suffered. The Spirit of Christ makes any such burden light and easy.
3. **Follows the character-developing road.** Finally, if we’d bear each other’s burdens in Christ, if we’d take this road we’re called to walk, we’re to. Do we find character development burdensome enduring toil and trials, maintaining commitment to others, giving sacrificially of our time and talents? Is there any other way to build character? Paul reflects back on the purpose of God’s Word telling us, “*everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” [vs. 4] The Scriptures are written for our use and benefit, as much as for those to whom they were first given. Faced with the task to support one another in times of need, at times apt to lose patience with our weak brother or sister – or their seemingly lack of scruples - the antidote is the Scriptures – the Word of God. We must get back to the Book and see how Christ helped others knowing He’s not changed, knowing He’ll always help us help others too.



No Magic Pill

I wish there were some magic pill I could leave you which you’d take two tablets daily before entering into ministry enabling you to bear each other’s burdens without the demands it will place upon you. I don’t. There’s No magic pill! What is required is we stop acting like family and be the family – the family of God, the church, the safe place to fail - which our Heavenly Father intended us to be; it means we let ourselves be vulnerable and open and even used, risking all that that entails. Begin with where your passion lies – do you love sports? What about joining our coaching a local team? Love coffee or tea? How would it go if you hosted a regular get together with others? What about volunteering with Women’s Rural Resource Center if you’re in the Strathroy / Middlesex County area, with the YMCA, or another organization locally? How about volunteering at your local school helping with recess or over lunch?

You and I are miserably inadequate to accomplish this task!

How do you carry your cross pleasing your neighbour, building them up for their good? What cost are you able to pay for their welfare? **Time, money, talents?** In what way can you demonstrate Christ alive within you? I don’t mean you go out with your bible and thump strangers on the street, but rather how can you reflect the joy, love and peace of Christ in your heart so others can see it in the way you live. And finally, how does the cross-displaying, Christ demonstrating road lead you to character development? The Spirit of Christ is where I’m encouraging you must go as you embark on the hard road of Godly service and compassion, truly caring for others – taking the high road which leads to respect for others, empathy for their needs, compassion for their circumstances, and subsequently harmony, joy, kindness, peace, love, longsuffering; and ultimately the realization of your goal which is to give praise and glory to God!

Blessings,

Pastor Dave