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Bear One Another's Burdens

Years ago there was German soldier who was slightly wounded in a battle, and he went home to his mother. Mom said, "You need to go to the hospital. They have set one up down the street." So, he went to the hospital. When he walked in, he saw two doors. One said, "Seriously Wounded," the other one said, "Slightly Wounded." As he wasn't hurt badly, he went through the second door. He walked all the way down a long hall. Again there were two doors. One said, "Officers," and the other one said, "Non-Officers." Being an enlisted man, he took the non-officers door. Again, there was a long hall. He walked all the way to the end where he came to two more doors. The left one said, "Party Members," and the right one said, "Non-Party Members." Not being a party member he walked through the right-hand door and found himself back out on the street. Upon returning home his mother asked, "Well son, did they help you?" He said, "To tell you the truth mom, they didn't do a thing for me, but you ought to see the tremendous organization they have."

That little story reminds us again of the difference between an organization and an organism. An organization can be well-structured, but the members may not care at all about each other. But an organism, by its very nature, has a concern, a connection, and a togetherness for every part of the body. In a body there is a sharing, a caring, and a bearing of one another's burdens by the very nature of organisms.

"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (KJV) "Carry each other's burdens and, in that way, you fulfill the law of Christ." (NIV) (Galatians 6:2)

What are the burdens that we need to bear for one another? The Greek word rendered burden is *bareos* meaning something that makes an overwhelming demand, that which brings sorrow or grief. A burden is anything that oppresses the spiritual development of a brother or a sister. Now mark that well. A burden is anything that oppresses the spiritual development of a brother or a sister.

With that definition, one can see quickly that burdens come in many different forms. For example, some burdens are spiritual. In fact, that is the immediate context of our command in Galatians 6:2. Go back to verse one. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted." Then our command, "Carry each other's burdens, and, in this way, you fulfill the law of Christ."

In Galatians 6:1, the word that is translated, "caught," those who are caught in a sin was a Greek word that was sometimes used to refer to an animal who found itself in a trap. That's an image, a metaphor, used all the way through Scripture. 2 Timothy 2:26 says, "Beware the snare of the devil." In James 1:14, James says, "But each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed." The term that is used there refers to a fishing lure. You see it's not that we are unaware of what sin is, but we're often unaware, like an animal heading to a trap, of how insidiously we are being drawn in, and we are often unaware of how drastic the consequences are going to be to the point that we become so burdened that we fall underneath the weight.

I read a story this week about the white ants in Africa. It has become one of the major building nemeses on the entire continent. Folks will pick out a spot of ground, and they'll build a nice house. They think everything looks good and one day, maybe months or a couple of years later, the entire house just caves in. It's because the white ant lives underground, and never comes out onto the surface; it never sees the sun. It lives underneath the house and eats away inside the timbers to the point that, when it has done its damage, one can take his finger and poke a hole through the largest beam.

That's the way it is in many lives, including some of you. You look so good on the outside, but one day the whole life, the whole house just collapses because all that decay was on the inside and nobody knew it.

Burdens may be:

1. Sin. The worst burdens are those that are caused by yielding to our desires and sinning.
2. Emotional. This is not when we are a perpetrator of sin, but rather when we are the victim of sin. Maybe we have been mistreated, neglected. Maybe it's the result of fear or a grief. Emotional burdens overwhelm us at times.
3. Physical. These may be caused by illness or accident, impairment, or sometimes just by advancing age.
4. Financial - A financial calamity brought on by a layoff, a medical emergency, a poor investment strategy, or 101 other factors.

We don't have space to list all the ways and shapes that burdens take their form. But a burden is anything that oppresses the spiritual development of a brother or a sister.

Our responsibility to brothers and sisters as they face these burdens.

1. Be humble. You've got to be humble, or you're going to be of no use to anybody. I find it amazing that our command about bearing one another's burdens is couched between two bookend verses that say much the same thing. Galatians 5:26, the last verse of chapter 5 states, "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" and Galatians 6:3, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Isn't it interesting that the command to bear one another's burdens is found between two bookends. The reason more people in God's church don't bear more burdens is we think we're too good to get down there and help. "Don't think so much of yourself."

I've always been amused by the story of the lady who is caught in a flash flood underneath an underpass. The water is rising up to the floorboard. A young fellow in a four-wheel drive comes across the bridge up top, stops, opens the door and leans down. He sees that older woman and he yells, "Maam, can I help you?" She looks up and says, "Not from up there!"

He is of no use from up there. Humility is to see ourselves and be down there. Humility is the foundation of the command in Galatians 6:1, "...you who are spiritual should restore a brother." You see spiritual doesn't mean you're perfect. Spiritual doesn't necessarily mean you act any differently, or much better than your brother. Spiritual certainly doesn't mean having a self-righteous haughtiness. Being spiritual means being full of the spirit.

In the same context as our passage, Galatians 5:22-23, we know what being full of the Spirit means, don't we? It means having love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control. Wrap all those up and you have a spirit of humility, don't you?

Too many times, we're like the people in a little town in Connecticut. It was a suburb of one of the major cities. Some of the people began to be a little incensed because there were reckless drivers running through their little suburb. So 53 of them put their names on a petition, took it to the sheriff and said, "Stop this in our town." The sheriff said, "I'll see what I can do." A few nights later, he put out a watch. Sure enough, he arrested five people for reckless driving through the town. All five of them had their names on the petition.

Sometimes we can proudly find faults in others that are also our own faults. If I am going to bear another's burden, whether that burden be spiritual, emotional, physical, or whatever, it starts by being humble, by being full of the spirit.

Many of you know the name Elza Huffard who wrote something that I'll never forget. "There was one who thought himself above me, and he was above me, until he had that thought." Isn't that good? It surely is right. Spiritual men and women are so cognizant of the need of God's grace in their own lives that they could never approach a brother in the spirit of arrogance.

So what do I do when I bear a burden? I examine my own humility. Am I being humble? Am I spiritual?

2. Be gentle - Galatians 6:1 says, "Be gentle, restore that brother with a spirit of gentleness." That's especially pertinent when the burden that we help bear is related to sin.
3. Bear the burden. That bearing will take on different forms depending upon what the burden is. The sentence construction says, "Carry and keep on carrying the burden." It's the present/perfect tense, it's not just a "give it a lick and a promise". Hit it once and move on your way. The way the sentence is structured says, "You do it and do it for as long as it takes." If the burden is the result of a person's sin, Galatians 6:1 says, "Restore the brother or sister gently." Restore was the word used by ancient Greek doctors to refer to the setting of a broken bone. If you've ever had a bone set, you know you want it done carefully, you want it done gently. Most importantly it's done for healing, not for punishment.

If the burden is emotional, you bear it through counsel, hugs, listening and prayers. You may do that day after day after day, as long as that brother or sister carries the burden. If the burden is financial, the burden is borne by giving your money or other assistance. If it's a physical burden, you bear it through your time, effort, compassion, and energy. Whatever the cause, bearing the burden means carrying the load until the brother or the sister can walk unburdened on his own again. I love the old proverb that says, "A joy shared is a double joy. A burden shared is half a burden."

What does that demand?

1. Real dedication to fellowship

In a Peanuts cartoon some time ago, Lucy looked at Charlie Brown and said, "Why are we here on earth?" Old compassionate Charlie Brown looked at cynical Lucy and said, "We're here to help other people." Lucy thought a second and put a scowl back on her face and said, "Then why are other people on earth?" That's a question the world asks? Why is everybody else here to mess me up? I don't want anything to do with them as long as they don't bother me, "Live and let live, stay out of my business. Look out for number one and let everything else go." Let me tell you something, Christ challenges that. If we fall victim to that, then we're not God's church. We may be an organization, but we're not an organism. We're certainly not the Body of Christ. Fellowship means more than a handshake on Sunday morning. It means an integration of life.

We need to be like the two dogs I heard about in Barnsley, England. There was a little dog named Nick, a terrier, and another little dog named Percy, a Chihuahua. One day Percy was hit by a car. Percy's owner thought that poor Percy was dead. So that owner, Christine Harrison, took that little Chihuahua body and put it in a plastic bag, went out back and buried it in the back yard. Nick, the terrier, was heartbroken. He went over and dug up the plastic sack. With his teeth he drug it over by the house. When Christine came out and picked up that sack, the heart was beating. Percy, the Chihuahua not only lived, he totally recovered.

When I heard that story it reminded me that God is in the resurrection business. Christians are raised to a newness of life when baptized into that Christ. They are resurrected from their death to sin and given a new life pure and free from sin.

We're committed by the same spirit that brought Jesus back to life, just pulling people from the clutches of death as we bear their burdens. Folks, the church is a hospital, but it doesn't matter how organized we are if nobody gets cured. If we're going to bear one another's burdens, there's got to be a real dedication to fellowship.

2. A new definition of membership in the body.

We are members of the Body of Christ. (Romans 12:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12) "Therefore we are members of one another." That's what being a body is all about. I think we need to be more like mountain climbers.

In 1953, you might remember the name Sir Edmund Hillary. He led the first team to go all the way to the zenith of Mount Everest. He had a guide with him, a Sherpa guide, whose name was Penzick Norgay. It's a good thing Norgay was with Sir Edmund Hillary because as they began their descent, Edmund Hillary's foot slipped and he so lost his balance that he fell completely, but Norgay had taken his pick and jammed it into the ice and because of the rope holding them together was able to keep hold of him until he was able to make his way over and grab hold of the mountain again. Otherwise, he would have fallen over a thousand feet. When they got down to the bottom, everybody was ready to make Penzick Norgay a hero, and he responded to the press, "No, no, no, I'm not a hero." He said, "Mountain climbers are tied to one another to help each other. That's just who we are."

He didn't want praise for that which was natural. He didn't want a claim for that which was expected. Our nature as a body demands that we be committed to mutual help.

The questions are.

1. Who is your line tied to? You can't all be tied to every member; that's just not possible, but your line had better be tied to some Christian brother or sister.
2. Who is going to hold you up when you slip and who will help bear your burdens?

Why bear the burden?

The answer is simple. It's right there in Galatians 6:2, "because it fulfills the law of Christ." "Well, what is the law of Christ?" I've looked all the way through the Bible and, in my opinion, Jesus gave that law when said to his apostles before a hostile group "A new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34)

Now when Jesus gave that command, it really was a bit of a paradox to his listeners because he wasn't giving a new command to love one another. Leviticus 19:18 commands, "Love one another." That one was a thousand years before Jesus. But the new command was to "Love one another as I have loved you." That's how much I want you to love one another.

Did he bear our burdens? He surely did. He bore every burden that we have, and every burden that we will have on that cross on a hill called, "Calvary." Because of that, Christians know a newness of life now, and an eternal life in a perfect place called "Heaven." Jesus has given us the ultimate model of what it means to bear one another's burdens—that's the new command. Do it as long as it takes, as deep as it takes, as much as it takes. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Amazing Grace #1313, Steve Flatt, May 25, 1997