

Carry Each Other's Burdens

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16 (NIV)

¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴ Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else. ⁵ For each one should carry their own load. ⁶ Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.

It's summer. It's vacation time. I took mine in May. My family drove out to Wisconsin and back. "Drive?" you ask, "Why didn't you fly?" Well, we did that last year. I can still picture the boys lugging around their backpacks stuffed to the brim, straining under the weight. Wendy and I had our duffel bags and I added to my baggage with a laptop bag. We took the Frontrunner from Layton Station down to the airport. The actual train ride was good, but the walking to the train, the walking through the airport, the waiting around at the terminal, the getting stuff out of the kids' backpacks for them to use at the terminal, packing it all up to get on the plane, taking it all out again while in flight, packing it back up again once we landed, all before getting to our destination. And when we are there, of course our parents love us and love seeing their grandkids so much that they have presents and toys and clothes all lined up to give to us while we are there. Then Wendy and I take a step back and look at the pile of newly acquired swag wondering how we are going to fit it into our carry-ons for the flight back.

Carrying around luggage on vacation is a burden, but there are many more kinds of baggage than the physical possessions that you pack in a suitcase or backpack. All of us have some kind of emotional baggage, like the hurt experienced as people leave, promises broken, hearts broken, being discarded, being used – all leaving emotional scars. We come with spiritual baggage. We come with questions raised because of what we grew up learning, a background in a religion that now we have shed and discarded and it seems like my parents lied to me. We come with questions because about God because of what is happening in the world with so much hate, so much violence, wondering if he really is in charge.

We have been so weighed down in our burdensome baggage that we are on the verge of breaking down. Everywhere we look, more hurt is happening, more scars are being formed, more questions are going unanswered, more lies are being told. Is there someone to help me with all this burdensome baggage?

In short, sin broke us. All the lies, the promises broken, the abuse, all the unanswered questions – these are all products of sin. Sin broke us. God knows this, and he offers a fix. He knows that this world leaves you feeling incomplete, as if you have been dumped on, as if everyone will fail you and that means God will too, that the concept of God is nothing more than a fairy tale to make people feel better about the lack of control that they feel in their lives or, at the very least, someone to blame when things go wrong when you did everything right.

However, God sees us as we truly are: people broken by sin. This is why he went into action. He came to earth, lived for us, lived perfectly for us, offered his life up for us, and then came back to life for us. He gave us his perfection. By doing so, he healed our broken lives. He took the pieces of our lives and filled them, made us complete. He restored us, like the setting of a bone in a cast. He put things right in our lives. Every promise kept, only truth told. He never abused us, never cast us aside. He answered the question of what was wrong with our lives and fixed it by giving us a new identity as a beloved, perfect child of God clothed with Jesus' perfection. God took us broken people and made us a perfect and new creation.

Yet, we still seem to carry around all this baggage. We treat our baggage – emotional and spiritual – as if they are ours to carry and that no one else will help us. We treat temptation as if the resistance is all on us and that no one can help us. We put all the burden of our baggage that God took from us and put it back on our shoulders.

Carrying all that baggage from our home to the airport to Wisconsin and back again was a burden. It was too much for our kids. So, what did Wendy and I do? We ended up carrying our kids' backpacks. I think there was even a point where one of them was riding on my shoulders with their backpack on and with my duffel and laptop bag strapped on my shoulders as well. We carried their burdensome luggage for them. This is what God does for us as he made us part of the family of believers. He carries our burdens.

But God knows that we tend to carry our own baggage. So, he had Paul write these instructions for all of us as part of his family of believers. Paul wasn't talking about luggage at the end of his letter to the Galatian Christians, but he was indeed talking about what we should do when we are bogged down and overwhelmed with our burdens. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (verse 2) And this is what we want to do because God has fixed us and made us a new creation, by taking away our sins and making us complete in him. Yet, how do we do carry each other's burdens? It's not as simple as just picking up one of the kid's backpacks.

If we are going to carry each other's burdens, then we have to learn what burdens our fellow Christians. This means that we have to spend time talking to these people that we worship with - and not just about vacations and the weather, but about what they struggle with. Is work dumping more and more responsibilities on your shoulders and performances are not what they should be? Is home life chaotic, that things are holding together by a thread? Do you have a cold that you can't quite seem to get rid of and you just want to be healthy again? Is your body not what it used to be and that bugs you? Are there rough spots in your marriage, fights that you wish would never be, a lack of interest in one another?

Even with all these burdens, we then come to church and put on our best. I don't mean clothes, but our appearance. We put on a front that everything is a-okay and that nothing burdens me because Christians are not overwhelmed with burdens, but we are. We are steeped in them, but I don't think that Christians should feel that way. If I tell others about it, will they view me as complainy? Will they keep asking me, "How are you doing?" every time I see them at church if I tell them? Will I look weak, as if I don't have it all together?

I'm going to let you in on a secret. None of us really have it all together. We just try to look like we do. The reality is that we are all burdened. Some of us are maybe more burdened than others. But maybe God did that specifically so that those with seemingly less burdens could then help shoulder the burdens of others who are so weighed down by life's baggage.

If we are going to carry each other's burdens, we will have to open ourselves to actually talk about the things that burden us, the things we struggle with. Now, you don't have to bear your life story with every member of the congregation to do this, but if you keep it all to yourself then no one can carry out God's will for you to help carry your burdens. Maybe this is something very difficult for you. Maybe you pride yourself on being self-sufficient, of managing whatever comes your way. But you know that you struggle. You feel weighed down. If you are willing to share those burdens, you will probably find someone who will help you carry them with you.

Now, I love this whole idea of helping carry each other's burdens, but what if you actually do this, if you actually share with one of your fellow Christians the burdens you bear? And what if you can't help them with their burdens, that these are things that you can't carry for them, that you don't have the expertise or training to help them with? There is no burden that you cannot help a fellow Christian carry. You know why? Because God has restored you and made you a new creation. As a new creation you always have the greatest solution right at hand. You can pray for that person. I've said it before, and I will say it again. Don't just say that you will pray for them. Yes, do that and do pray for them in your time. But take some time right then and there. Ask if you can pray. It doesn't have to be fanciful. You can have umms and ahhs in it. Prayer is meant for you to pour your heart out to God. Don't know what to ask for? Tell God that. Ask him to simply do what is best with the burdens that this person is carrying. Take it to the Lord in prayer! By doing so you will help carry each other's burdens.

Carrying the boys with their backpacks as well as my luggage, that was a burden. So, you know why we drove for vacation this year? Because our minivan, with all its cargo space aching to be filled, could carry all the burdensome luggage. That's what it did. That's what the minivan was designed to do. God has made us into a new creation, perfect, complete, fixed. Because God has made us a new creation we lack nothing. As that new creation he tells us to carry each other's burdens, to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (verse 10) "So, let us not become weary in doing good." (verse 9) Find out what your fellow believers are burdened with. Look for how you can help carry each other's burdens. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Have the Almighty carry all of our burdens as we, empowered by him, help carry each other's. Amen.