



Light from the Word

Bear One Another's Burdens

Editor's Note: The Bible uses the term "one another" multiple times and it is clear God is very interested in our relationships. Jesus taught that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. In 2018, we will look at several of the "one anothers" in the Bible.

Theme verse: *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."*

At some time in our life we will face the necessity of bearing some type of burden ourselves, and we will have the opportunity to help someone else bear one of theirs. Burdens are defined in Webster's 1828 dictionary as that which is borne with labor or difficulty; that which is grievous, wearisome or oppressive. We usually have little or no choice in the burdens we carry, and they come upon believers and nonbelievers alike. They may be related to physical or mental afflictions, sickness or disease, financial difficulty, relational problems, natural disasters, and the list continues. These burdens can be very personal such as a serious disease or relationship issue, or they can be more corporate in nature such as an entire community that suffers from a natural disaster. In virtually all cases, burdens are much easier when shared. By doing so we are obeying the scripture, *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."* Using our gifts, abilities, and energy to assist someone in need is akin to loving God "with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

Even though it is God's desire that we gladly assist one another in bearing our burdens, He does not expect us to provide beyond our means. *"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance*

also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack." This New Testament scripture refers to the time when God provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. When Moses told the people of God's commandment, their initial obedience and mutual cooperation resulted in a miraculous provision. Later on, the people forgot the miracle behind the manna, and began complaining because they found their diet too monotonous. Their continual murmuring then developed into a burden for Moses, *"And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?"* God answered Moses' request by providing seventy elders of the people that *"they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone."*

Bearing one another's burdens can take many forms. James instructs us to "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," while Job gave them both food and clothing. The prophet Isaiah suggests that bearing one another's burdens is the true purpose of fasting and sacrifice: *"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"* Dorcas, "full of good works and almsdeeds," made coats and garments for the needy. Jesus relieved the burdens of a wide variety of people, *"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."*

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In the New Testament, the book of Acts contains an interesting example of individuals within the church helping one another. In the early days, the believers were so zealous of doing this that all who owned land or houses sold them, and the money was distributed by the apostles to all who had a need. Later, when a great famine was predicted by one of their own prophets, the apostles realized that the land of Judea would very soon be in need of relief. *“And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”*

At times, one might surmise that some burdens might come upon others for a valid reason. Perhaps we think they have made some questionable choices that have affected their long-term welfare, and we forgo helping someone for these or similar reasons. We should consider

how Jesus answered the lawyer's question of *“who is my neighbor”* in the familiar account of the Good Samaritan. Bearing in mind the context of other scriptures, it seems probable that the two men had reason to be somewhat prejudiced against each other, *“for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”* The Samaritan could easily have justified himself in passing by the unfortunate man just as the priest and the Levite did earlier. Instead, he put aside any selfish motives and simply *“...went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”*

Our motive for relieving others of their burdens should always be that of genuine love. It is not for us to determine their intentions or decide whether we think they deserve it or not. Jesus reminds us that when we bear one another's burdens out of sincere love, we are doing the same to Him. *“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* We look to Christ as the supreme example of bearing our burdens when we certainly did not deserve it, *“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we*

did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” His desire is to help all of us for our eternal good, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

Endnotes

- ¹ Galatians 6:2
- ² Galatians 6:2
- ³ 2 Corinthians 8:12-15
- ⁴ Numbers 11:11
- ⁵ Numbers 11:17
- ⁶ James 1:27
- ⁷ Job 31:15-20
- ⁸ Isaiah 58:6-7
- ⁹ Acts 9:36
- ¹⁰ Matthew 11:5
- ¹¹ Acts 4:32-37
- ¹² Acts 11:28-30
- ¹³ John 4:9
- ¹⁴ Luke 10:34
- ¹⁵ Matthew 25:40
- ¹⁶ Isaiah 53:4
- ¹⁷ Matthew 11:28-30