

Pastor Stan Myers
LIGHTENING THE LOAD
GALATIANS 6:2

Got problems? Of course you do. We all do. But all problems are not the same. Some are more serious and more consequential and more destructive than others. Some take a much greater emotional toll than others. So, I'd like you to imagine that problems could be assigned a certain amount of weight, and that the amount of weight is determined by how significant the problem is and how much trauma that problem produces.

For example, let's say that your house burning to the ground weighs 50 lbs, losing your wallet is 2 lbs, and having an argument with your spouse over who left the garage door open is 2 oz.

The death of a loved one is 100 lbs; going through a divorce, or watching your parents do so is 90 lbs, and having major surgery is 5 lbs.

Having a child rebel and turn away from the Lord is 80 lbs, an unresolved conflict that leads to a severed friendship is 60 lbs, and watching the Beavers struggle all season is 1 lb.

All of us are packing weight. However, some of us, because of the nature of our problems, are packing a lot more weight than others. Some of us, if truth be told, are packing a staggering amount of weight. Our problems are so heavy that it feels as though we are being crushed by them.

I'm not saying this to generate sympathy for those who feel this way. I'm saying it simply because it's true. There are seasons of life when all of us go through trials and hardships that seem overwhelming, and some of us are in that season right now.

You may already know that the Bible sometimes refers to our problems as burdens. And it assumes that sometimes those burdens get so heavy that they can seem unbearable. But the Bible also assures us that God cares very much about those burdens. On one occasion Jesus said, *"Come unto me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest"* (Matt. 11:28).

Jesus invites us to present Him with our problems and difficulties so that He can relieve us of the tremendous weight that comes from being anxious, afraid, angry, exhausted, confused, heartbroken, depressed, overwhelmed, or whatever else one is experiencing at such times.

But you should know that *when* we come to Jesus, the way He often provides that relief is through his church—through the people who have His Spirit living in them and can express His compassion and care to the one who is burdened.

We're going to look at an admonition in Paul's letter to the Galatians in which He reminds the church of their responsibility to bear one another's burdens, and how important it is to God. It is in chapter 6, verse 2, but as always, I want to begin by looking at the context.

Verse 1. *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted"* (Gal. 6:1). Paul is making some concluding comments to the church at Galatia, and he begins by showing them how much they *need* each other and how essential they are to each other's spiritual well-being.

In verse 1 he tells them that they especially need each other is when one of them gets tripped or trapped by temptation and ends up falling into sin. When that happens, he or she is in a very vulnerable state—vulnerable to paralyzing guilt and shame, vulnerable to

alienation from God and the body of Christ, vulnerable to sliding down a slippery slope that leads to further destruction.

At such times that erring brother or sister needs our intervention. Not, on the one hand, to shame or condemn him for his lack of self-control or his moral failure. And not, on the other, to pat her on the back and say, "Hey, it's no big deal. It's not my place to judge." Rather, to come alongside such a person, acknowledge their dangerous plight, and gently restore them back to fellowship with the Lord and his people.

But as we do so we need to always be mindful that sin is not to be taken lightly. It is powerful and it is deceptive, and if we are not careful, we also can be tripped or trapped by it. Thus, we need to be spiritually alert when dealing with such matters. We need to put on the full armor of God so that we are protected, lest we ourselves get wounded by one of Satan's fiery darts.

Paul goes on in **verse 2**, ² *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (6:2)*. The word translated "burden" is a word that means "weight" or "load," but is frequently used metaphorically in the New Testament. Leading Greek lexicographers, Louw & Nida, define it as "hardship which is regarded as particularly burdensome or exhausting" (Louw & Nida).

In other words, Paul is talking about people who are weighed down by troubles and trials, and who are staggering beneath the load. This could include, in light of the context, people who cannot seem to *stop* sinning and cannot overcome that behavior apart from the assistance of others.

It would include people who are having serious trouble in their marriages, or serious trouble in some other relationship. It includes people who are suffering from depression or some other disorder. It includes people who have suffered a tremendous loss, like the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job, or the loss of one's home. It also includes people who are suffering from some physical affliction which has imposed restrictions or limitations that prevent them from being fully functional.

There are dozens of burdens that are extremely heavy, and the thing is, some people are not just carrying *one*. They are carrying two or three or four at a time and they are struggling under the weight of them all, barely able to keep their balance, feeling as though their legs could buckle and they could collapse at any time.

Paul tells us that it is God's intention that when someone in the church is carrying that kind of load, others in the church come around him or her, get underneath it, and help that person carry it. In other words, by other people getting involved, the load is lightened for the person who is staggering under its weight. He can find relief, rest, and whatever other assistance he needs to keep going.

This is the *how* we love. This is what love looks like in the body of Christ. In fact, at the end of verse 2 Paul says that by bearing one another's burdens we fulfill the law of Christ. If you know anything about the Galatians, they were a people who prided themselves on their love of the Law of Moses and their determination to keep it.

But Paul said it's not the Law of Moses you need to be concerned about; it is the law of Christ. And what is the law of Christ? It is very simple, and it is very concise. In chapter 5 Paul said, *"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'"* (Gal. 5:14).

The law of Christ is to love. But Christian love is not some nebulous, abstract concept. It is tangible. It is practical. And in verse 2 he says that love is expressed when

we bear one another's burdens. Bearing one another's burdens is a way that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

I want to remind you that God did not call us into relationship with one another merely to be nice to each other on Sunday mornings, or merely to enjoy one another's company when we meet together once or twice a week. He has called us to love each other deeply, and that means plunging into each other's lives and entering into each other's pain and sorrow and suffering. It means bearing one another's burdens.

I'd like to spend the rest of our time talking about what that means and what that looks like for our church. And the first thing I'd like to do is address burden bearers. If you are carrying a heavy load, would you please share your burden with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Would you talk about it? Would you let one or two or a few other brothers and sisters in Christ know what is going on in your life?

I discovered not too long after coming to EBC that this church has a culture of privacy. In other words, we tend to keep our problems and struggles to ourselves. I cannot tell you how many times someone in our church has experienced a crushing loss or a life-threatening crisis, and not only do I not hear about it; their extended family members don't even get informed.

"I don't want people to fuss over me..." Or "I know how busy you are...I didn't want to add something else to your plate..." Or "I knew we would eventually get through it."

That sounds very thoughtful. That seems polite—even virtuous. But it's not a virtue. Toughing it out on your own or picking yourself up by your own bootstraps may be an admirable trait when you see it played out on the big screen in a Western Movie. But it doesn't play well in real life. It most often exacerbates your pain...unnecessarily. It prolongs your suffering...unnecessarily. It can cause spiritual and emotional paralysis...unnecessarily.

God's remedy for relieving your burden is to share it with members of your spiritual family. It is God's way of lightening your load. It is the first step to getting the support, encouragement, and relief you need. I'm not saying you have to publicize your problems to the whole church, though there are times when that may be appropriate and beneficial. Nor am I suggesting that you put every problem on the prayer chain. I am simply saying that you share your burdens with one or two or a few close brothers and sisters in Christ who can come alongside you and pray for you and care for you.

And if you don't have a few close brothers and sisters in Christ, I would suggest that you join a Life Group, or a women's or men's Bible Study, or a prayer group. These small groups provide a context for burdens to be shared with one another and for the load to be lightened by the others in the group.

I want to shift our attention now to some application to burden *sharers*—those who are able to help carry the load for a struggling brother or sister in Christ. First, you qualify to be a burden bearer. You have what it takes to effectively bear someone else's burden. The admonition to bear one another's burdens is for *every* Christian, not just for those who are pastors or deacons or who have the gift of mercy or encouragement. So many people in any given week are carrying such heavy burdens that it requires the participation of all of us to be involved in this ministry.

You might be saying, "But I don't have any special skills, I don't have a particularly endearing or empathetic personality. I'm not adept at offering spiritual counsel or insight."

Let me assure you that you *do* have something important to contribute. You have the Spirit of Christ living in you, and *He* wants to express the love of Christ through you. And

He wants to do it, *uniquely*, through your particular personality, your gifts, your abilities, your strengths, and your resources. You have something to offer that someone else cannot offer. And the way you do it doesn't have to look like how someone else does it.

A few months ago, I was weighed down by some heavy burdens, and someone from our church called our daughter to ask how they could lighten the load. He said to her, "I really want to do something for your dad, but I'm not empathetic like Greg Hoffman or Tom Aman." So, Carly Blue suggested something very practical that she knew would alleviate some stress and ease my burden. Through that suggestion, this man organized a workday to clean up from the ice-storm that had made a mess of our property. And one Saturday fourteen men showed up at our house with excavators and chainsaws and did more work than I could have done by myself in five years.

I cannot tell you what an encouragement that was! I cannot tell you how much that lightened my load! I cannot tell you how loved by Jesus I felt.

Helping to lighten the load for a heavily burdened brother or sister could mean something as simple as providing a meal, sending a card, or taking them out for a cup of coffee. I know some people in our church who are musically gifted who take their instruments to the home or the hospital of a hurting loved one and sing soothing songs.

The point is you have what it takes to effectively bear someone's burden. You may need to get creative. You may need to make a phone call to someone who knows specifically how you can help, like the man who called Carly Blue. You may need to adjust your busy schedule or make some sacrifices. But you *can* do it.

The second point of application has to do with how we deal with difficult situations. You must not be afraid or intimidated by other people's problems.

As you know, some problems are delicate, some are messy, some are complicated, some are time-consuming, some are emotionally draining, some involve dealing with matters that are very sensitive, and some involve matters that are awkward or uncomfortable.

It's not always easy on such occasions to know *how* to help, or what to say, or how to act. But I want you to know that this is where the depth of our love for each other is proven. Because if we truly love a person, we are willing to do anything or go anywhere for that person, even if it's hard.

Two Sundays ago, I announced at 8:00 AM that Merwyn Richert had gone to be with the Lord just a few hours earlier on Saturday night. Unbeknownst to me, someone who heard me make that announcement slipped out of the service and went straight to Marie Richert's home just to be with her. I only found this out because I called Marie right after church. She said this woman made her breakfast, cleaned her bathroom, and spent time talking with her. Then she arranged for another couple to come over later that morning so that Marie could use their phone to call her son Scott on FaceTime and share the news about Merwyn's death.

That is what it looks like to bear and share one another's burdens, even when it is difficult.

Let me say it again, we love each other when we plunge into each other's lives and enter into each other's pain and hurt and sorrow and suffering. And that kind of love is willing to endure anything, including silence, discomfort, tension, and raw emotion.

There is a community for troubled and homeless boys called *Boys Town* in Omaha, Nebraska that was established in 1917. In a prominent place in that boys' home stands a

statue that is titled, *Two Brothers*. It was the concept of the community's founding director, Father Edward Flanagan, after an incident that occurred in 1921.

There was a partially crippled resident at *Boys Town* who wore leg braces, but this boy was so dearly loved by the other boys that they would take turns giving him a ride on their backs. There is a famous photograph of this boy and one of the other youths giving him a ride, with a caption underneath that was later turned into a song title made famous by the *Hollies*. Because, the story goes, the one who was carrying the crippled boy was asked the question, "Ain't he heavy?" To which the youth replied, "Mister, he ain't heavy, he's my brother!"

When we get underneath the burden of a brother or sister who is staggering beneath its weight, we are actually doing more than just helping to carry their burden. We are carrying them. We are helping them to keep pressing on and moving forward in their walk with Christ. And that is a tremendous expression of love.

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GALATIANS 6:2

MAIN IDEA: WE LOVE BY COMING ALONGSIDE THOSE WHO ARE WEIGHED DOWN BY BURDENS AND HELPING THEM CARRY THE LOAD.



INTRODUCTION—THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF SOME PROBLEMS

THE CONTEXT (1)

RESTORING THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN

BEING CAREFUL LEST WE FALL

BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS (2)

MEANING OF "BURDEN"

KINDS OF BURDENS

LIGHTENING THE LOAD

THE SUMMARY OF LOVE

APPLICATION

SELF-DISCLOSURE OF THE BURDEN-BEARER

SPREADING THE LOAD FOR BURDEN-SHARERS

DEALING WITH DELICATE MATTERS

FAQ'S

Pastor Stan Myers
“Application Questions”

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2 ESV).

Think of a person you know in our church who is going through a difficult time right now and might be discouraged, overwhelmed, exhausted, or heartbroken. How might you help lighten their load?

What are some signs that indicate a brother or sister in Christ might be carrying a heavy load (problems, hardships, sorrows), even though he or she hasn’t spoken about it?

Sometimes people don’t share their burdens because they don’t want to be the focus of attention, or because they don’t want to be considered “needy.” How can we help such people when we know they need help?

Are you carrying a heavy burden but are reluctant to tell your brothers and sisters in Christ about it? If so, why? What do you think it might take for you to be more *transparent* in sharing your problems and hardships so that others can help carry your burdens?