

CHAPTER 17

**THE CROSS AND “BURDEN BEARING”**

BEARING BURDENS IN INTERCESSION AND THE PARADIGM OF THE CROSS

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)

I am sure we all bear burdens for others as we carry out various kinds of compassionate deeds. In fact, all our service in which we follow Christ as an example includes a willingness to suffer in some way to relieve burdens of others; some aspects of this have been mentioned previously in chapters on being a slave (14) and on suffering (15). In this chapter, I want to focus only on the example of Jesus our Burden Bearer as it applies to intercessory prayer.

We who are strong *ought to bear with [carry off]\* the failings of the weak* and not to please ourselves . . . For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." (Rom. 15:1) \**Online Bible*

**A. Jesus, Our Burden Bearer**

I cannot stress too much that focusing in worship and praise on Jesus as our Ultimate Burden Bearer is of utmost significance to this whole topic. Remember that *committing ourselves to reflect His wonderful nature is one of best ways to express praise and worship to Him*. A result of our focusing on His sacrificial bearing of our burdens on Calvary is our reflection of His love in similar ways:

We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory [*incl. glory as our Burden Bearer*], are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory . . . . (2 Cor. 3:18)

In other words, our effectiveness in bearing burdens for others will depend on the extent that we worship and praise Him for being our Example and also on the extent we commit ourselves to be conformed to His example. Further, as we truly worship Him as the Ultimate Burden Bearer, we learn to know Him more fully and learn better how to give Him our burdens. To pray with faith that others can be released of their burdens, we must first of all have had experiences of seeing our burdens carried by Jesus in His suffering.

As you read this chapter prayerfully, I suggest you join me in daily contemplating Jesus our Intercessor bearing the burden of our sin and our pain in His suffering. Remember to worship Him, commit yourself to follow His example, and repent of all things that would hinder you from worshipping Him as a Burden Bearer and from living out this aspect of the paradigm of the Cross.

Surely *he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows*, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. . . . *the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed* . . . and he will bear their iniquities. . . . he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and *made intercession for the transgressors*. (Isa. 53:4, 5, 11, 12)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; *by his wounds you have been healed*. (1 Pet. 2:24)

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God . . . *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted*. Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, *fix your thoughts on Jesus*, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. (Heb. 2:17-18, 3:1)

*Cast all your anxiety [care-KJV] on him because he cares for you*. (1 Pet. 5:7)

Days are filled with sorrow and care, hearts are lonely and drear . . .  
Cast your care on Jesus today, leave your worry and fear . . .  
Troubled soul, the Savior can see ev'ry heartache and tear;  
Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near.<sup>1</sup>

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He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them His very own;  
He bore the burden to Calv'ry and suffered and died alone.  
How marvelous! how wonderful! And my song shall ever be;  
How marvelous! how wonderful is my Savior's love for me!<sup>2</sup>

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No one ever cared for me like Jesus, There's no other friend so kind as He;  
No one else could take the sin and darkness from me—O how much He cared for me!<sup>3</sup>

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Is there a heart o'er-bound by sorrow? Is there a life weighed down by care?  
Come to the cross—each burden bearing, All your anxiety—leave it there.  
All your anxiety, all your care, Bring to the mercy seat—leave it there;  
Never a burden He cannot bear, Never a friend like Jesus!<sup>4</sup>

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How well do we know the caring heart of the Father expressed by Jesus' suffering? How much do we truly express the caring heart of Jesus by our willingness to suffer in prayer for others?

### **B. Paul's Example in Burden Bearing**

In the epistles of Paul, his many references to his extensive identification with the paradigm of the Cross include noteworthy accounts of his incredible willingness to suffer for others as he interceded for them. As Paul lived out this paradigm so extensively in his prayer life, he can point us to the glorious example of the Lord Himself bearing our burdens.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. ***So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*** (2 Cor. 4:10-12)

I want you to know ***how much I am struggling for you*** . . . For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit . . . (Col. 2: 1a, 5a)

The key verse I have used for the title of this book expresses Paul's passionate desire to participate in the very sufferings of Christ: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the ***fellowship of sharing in his sufferings***, becoming like him in his death, . . ." (Phil. 3:10) A significant aspect of this joining with the sufferings of Christ is the sharing of burdens in our intercession for others, called "travailing" by some. Paul likens this kind of prayer to the hard labour of childbirth: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, . . ." (Gal. 4:19) As I pray for family and friends, that the nature of Christ will develop in them, I am beginning to feel some of these labour pains that Paul felt: however, I also feel that I am a long, long way from being where Paul was in His identification with Christ in His sufferings.

Some of the labour pain I feel is for the likeness of Christ to be formed in myself; the more I focus on Jesus, the more I see the need for great growth within me to become like Him. Times of

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<sup>1</sup>John M. Moore, "Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary".

<sup>2</sup>Charles H. Gabriel, "My Savior's Love".

<sup>3</sup>Charles F. Weigle.

<sup>4</sup>Edward Henry Joy, "All Your Anxiety".

brokenness come as I see how uncaring and unfeeling I have been to some and how selfish have been some of my motives. However, I have decided not to let my lack hinder me from praying for others and encouraging others to be more committed to this process. Just as a mother considers that all her labour pains have been worthwhile when she holds her new-born child, so the great glory for enduring suffering that is promised us helps us to endure whatever suffering we experience here:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (Rom. 8:18, 19).

Notice that the glory is to be **revealed IN US!** Surely that glory includes the same glory that was revealed in Jesus in His suffering and death and includes the glory of His life that we can experience now in this life. Right after this glorious statement of the glory that follows our suffering, Paul writes:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies . . . In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. (Rom. 8:22, 23, 26)

Sometimes, we have difficulty finding words to express such prayers, and find that we can express them only with tears or with groans; but as we do, we must remember that it is our privilege to be used by the Spirit to pray on behalf of others to help them give their burdens to Jesus and come forth as true sons of God like Jesus. Perhaps we do not experience this burden bearing more because we need to further commit ourselves to be like Jesus in His suffering for us and keep deepening our commitment to be conformed daily to the paradigm of the Cross.

I find it hard to fathom the depth of Paul’s willingness to suffer for others in prayer: he was willing to be cursed so that his fellow Jewish brethren might be saved—willing to bear the wrath of God that was theirs so that they might be blessed by God’s mercy:

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. (Rom. 9:2)

May God increasingly develop in us this same sacrificial love that Paul had as we pray that others may commit themselves to Christ and have His life living in and through them.

### **C. Rees Howell Intercessor**

Thinking and writing about Paul’s radical suffering in intercession brought to my mind a book I had read years ago: *Rees Howell Intercessor*, a biography of a leader in revivals in Wales in the early 1900s.<sup>5</sup> As I was contemplating reading it again to find material to quote, I was gripped by a strange fear that God might require me to become as extreme as Rees Howells had been in intercessory burden bearing. He went to drastic lengths to identify with the suffering of those for whom he prayed: to intercede for a tramp, he became as a tramp; when dealing with a sick lady with consumption, he became willing to take upon himself her sickness and death. Somehow, the burden bearing of this Christian leader in recent times caused me to think more specifically about our commitment to suffering for Christ in intercession more than the example of Paul did. I am praying much about my fears and seeking the Lord’s mind about what type of burdens He wants me to bear for Him. I am realizing that we need to trust the Lord to lead us step by step into the kind of self-denial and suffering that He has planned for us and that He will prepare us to carry whatever burdens He has chosen for us.

Following are two statements in one sentence about Rees Howells that seem completely paradoxical, but intriguing:

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<sup>5</sup>Norman Grubb, *Rees Howells Intercessor* (Ft. Washington, PA: CLC, 1983).

Beyond measure large-hearted, *irrepressible in the joy of the Lord which poured out of him* (“The Spirit is full of jokes,” he once daringly said), this man of God, who *bore on his heart the world’s deep suffering* and sin till it broke him, . . . .<sup>6</sup> (emphases mine)

How could he have poured out the joy of the Lord and also have borne such suffering? As I prayerfully read his story, I was earnestly seeking the Lord for answers to this question so that I can learn to do both and encourage others to do the same. For one thing, the amazing results of Rees Howell’s prayers caused him great joy. Further, his personal prayer life was filled with an intimate and joyful communication between him and His Lord. I am reminded what the Lord said about the burdens He places on us:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

I appreciate the explanation given by Mark Sandford, that this metaphor refers to the training of a young ox. It would be coupled with a mature, trained ox and first of all would walk beside its strong partner with only the weight of the yoke itself to bear. Then, gradually, the weight of the load to be pulled would be added to the young ox as he grew stronger. Thus, Jesus is saying that He will only place burdens on us to the measure that we are able to easily bear them, but that the burden will steadily increase as our strength increases.

We have to be willing to be trained to bear burdens, following the example of Jesus; but we have to learn also what burdens are truly from Him and what burdens Satan would try to place on us.

Our own pride and fears cause us deep suffering, which are turned into joy when we learn to have all of the roots of these aspects of our sinful nature dealt with at the Cross. Much of our joy is lost because we do not quickly recognize on the Cross that He carried all our burdens and those of others; the relief that comes from giving the Lord our burdens is truly a cause for joy:

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry Ev’ry thing to God in pray’r.<sup>7</sup>

In Philippians 2 (vs. 5-11)—a passage I have dealt with extensively before in Chapter 7—Paul breaks into a joyful hymn of praise, which includes two themes on which our joy is based: (1) Jesus’ identifying Himself with all of our suffering in becoming a humble slave and suffering the Cross, where He bore all our own burdens and all those of others; and (2) the glory that followed, which shows the glory we will share with Him if we suffer with Him. We truly “rejoice in the Lord” when we focus on Him in worship and see Him as our burden bearer willing to suffer to make it possible that we can become burden bearers like Him—the “joy set before him”.

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of our faith, who *for the joy set before him endured the cross*, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. *Consider him* who endured such opposition from sinful men, *so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*. (Heb. 12:2, 3)

[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

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<sup>6</sup>Norman Grubb, “Foreword”.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Scriven, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”