

Generation-to-Generation: Carry One Another's Burdens

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Women's Ministry at The Orchard is dedicated to helping women understand who we are in Christ and how to glorify God specifically through our womanhood. Besides the Titus Two Tool events twice a year:

- **Titus 2 Discipleship/Equipping track:** intergenerational opportunity for women who love God's Word & would like to better learn how to be true women of God. Our next class will be in the fall & you can email or call me if you are interested.
- Women's summer Bible Study is going to be *Living the Gospel in Relationships*. We'll meet Wednesday evenings beginning June 16.

We have a full evening so let's get started with our topic. I will begin by reading Galatians 6: 1-5. Here in verse 2 it says "*bear, or carry, one another's burdens,*" but then in verse 5 we read that each will have to bear her own load, so let's look at the difference between a burden and a *load*.

Burdens are things that are too heavy for us to carry alone. These are the trials that are *added* to our daily load which take us beyond our own strength and resources.

Some examples of this would be above average or lingering sickness, intense relational strife, a special needs child, loss of a job or career, a rebellious teen, abuse, infertility, death of a loved one, and other devastating circumstances that come upon us.

The Greek word for load means "cargo" or the "burden of daily toil." This describes the every day things we all need to do. Loads are like knapsacks. Knapsacks are possible to carry and we are each expected to carry our own.

This includes dealing with our own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the everyday responsibilities that God has given to us, even though it may take great effort. Some examples of this would be our role as a wife (including sex), being a mom, being single, our jobs, & daily responsibilities such as laundry, meals, homework, cleaning, etc.

Problems arise when we act as if *our burdens are daily loads* and refuse the help of others, *or as if* our daily loads are boulders that we shouldn't have to carry.

Burdens can tempt us to isolate ourselves, and to give way to despair and hopelessness. By not sharing our burdens we forfeit the help, prayer, and encouragement God wants to give to us through His people, as well as denying others the joy and blessing of serving us.

On the other hand, when we treat our daily loads like *boulders*, we will be prone to a spirit of grumbling and whining, acting like *our lives* are harder than anyone else's. Life is *hard*, yet God promises to supply the grace we need to live each day with a joyful, thankful spirit.

Because Christ knows that we are weak and unable to carry *even our little knapsacks with the right heart or motivation*, He invites us to be yoked with Him. As He eases the *burden* of our loads, we can say with David (Psalm 68:19), "*Blessed be the Lord who daily bears us up; God is our salvation.*" Our loads give us *daily opportunities* to practice Christ-likeness, walking by faith in the power of the Spirit who dwells in us.

As women, it is our *calling* to encourage one another to **joyfully embrace** the roles God has designed us for, praising Him for the good gifts He has given us; husbands who work hard for us, the privilege of mothering children, comfortable houses to clean and maintain, friends who love and accept us, & jobs that fill our hands with satisfying work. Though no one has perfect circumstances, all of us can worship God with thankfulness for equipping us for, and entrusting us with, our daily loads.

Tonight we are going to hear from 3 women who were given burdens to carry **beyond** their normal load or knapsacks. You will hear how God used others in the body of Christ to help them carry their burden, as well as ways people *failed to say or do what was helpful*. The reason I have asked these women to share is because many of us did not grow up with a biblical model of what it looks like to carry one another's burdens. But before we hear from them, let me give just a few comments on the blessings of both burden carrying and burden bearing.

In John 11 we learn that God has a purpose in allowing suffering in our lives. Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus to tell Him their brother was very sick. Scripture says us that Jesus loved this family, yet when he heard Lazarus was sick *He stayed where he was for 2 more days!* Of course He knew that Mary and Martha would be grieving, waiting, & watching for him. But He also knew the outcome. *He allowed this temporary suffering to reveal a greater reality; Resurrection Life.*

But *before* Jesus called Lazarus from his tomb, He entered into their grief and wept with them. This shows that while **we** can be confident that God will use all suffering for His purposes in our lives, we are being like Christ when we weep with those who weep, *lifting* their burdens by demonstrating our love and concern.

Job's friends give us both a good and bad example of biblical comfort. In Job 2:11-12 we read that *"when Job's friends heard about all the troubles that had come upon Job, they set out from their homes and met together to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him and his pain, they began to weep and grieve with him. Then they sat on the ground for a week without saying a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."*

The ministry of dropping what we are doing to go sit and grieve with someone is rare and precious. Unfortunately, Job's friends didn't remain silent. Mike Mason says, *"The main problem with this mission of mercy was that no mercy was forthcoming."* One by one Job's friends gave words that were condemning, judgmental, pious, and unbiblical. *"They had a low view of God's grace and stopped short of the cross."*

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that *"we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* This reminds us that we must check our motives before we rush to help someone, taking time to ask God to reveal the specific way He might use us.

When we rely heavily on the Spirit's guidance, we will be less prone to forsake our own family's needs, or become exhausted trying to meet *every* need we see around us. We will also avoid *making excuses* for failing to leave our "to do" lists and go. *Always, though, we must make sure our serving is for God's glory and not our own.*

God calls us to minister in different ways at different times, through the ministry of prayer, presence, and practical help such as meals, cleaning, caring for children, or running errands. But He calls *all of us* to be available! The most helpful burden bearers fix their eyes on Christ and not on the circumstances of the one they are serving. Let's look at why this is vitally important.

Like Job's friends, we are often unaware of what God is doing in and through another person's suffering. Because it makes us uncomfortable to see suffering, we are prone to try to rescue others from their pain. If this is our primary goal, we will be tempted to give worldly, rather than biblical, counsel. Unless we remember that our highest purpose is to bring glory to God by trusting Him through difficult circumstances, we may miss the *much more* that God wants to do in us and through us.

Now, I want to speak to situations when suffering is due to abuse. *God never condones sin*. He calls the church to be defenders of widows and orphans, to fight for justice for those who are oppressed. God does not expect us to remain in danger's way, whether it is in an abusive relationship or being pursued by enemies that want to destroy us.

Being a godly helpmate does not mean passively submitting to abuse, enabling a man to continue in sin, which will one day come under the judgment of God. That is a wrong application of submission. But that also doesn't mean we should follow the world's way by counseling a friend to initiate divorce. God *may allow* divorce, but again, our highest goal for others is that they would bring glory to God even through the most difficult circumstances.

So if a friend is in danger, one way we can carry her burden is by helping her develop a safety plan, encouraging her to expose the sin to the appropriate authorities, praying and walking with her. We must rightly handle the Word of God, guarding against our own emotions and worldly persuasions. Unbiblical counsel can simply leave a woman more vulnerable and confused.

In every trial of pain, loss, and suffering, our eyes and hope must be in the cross! Whatever we do should be with an eye toward reconciliation and redemption *in the other person's life*. It should never be primarily about our happiness. It should always be about Christ.

When Jesus doesn't make His presence known right away, it is because He wants to be glorified in us through the waiting period and in our deliverance. He uses our circumstances as a tool and a test to reveal sin in *us*, and to draw us to His Word and a deeper dependence and love for Him. But always, He is with us, working for our eternal good.

When we are going through a season of suffering, we must also never expect of people what only God can provide. We can be certain that whatever our trial, *no one* will be able to interpret our every need, know our every fear, or be available every time we might like a phone call or visit.

We must never put the full weight of our needs and expectations upon others. We can and should share our burdens with them, but ultimately we must look to God, trusting Him to meet those needs in the way and time He deems best. He is the God of all comfort, (1 Cor. 1) and when He allows us to be alone in our struggles, it is only that we may turn our hearts to Him rather than other people.

Let me give you an example. When I was newly married, my husband was transferred out east, requiring me to quit the teaching job I loved, move away from all my family and friends, and wind up lonely and pregnant in a 1-bedroom apartment. I carried the burdens of a very hard pregnancy, the loss of my job, relationships, and adjusting to marriage with morning sickness that lasted all day. In 2 years, we never found a good church and it was literally months before we met *anyone!*

As you might imagine, during that time I gave way to self-pity and despair, which made life quite difficult for my new husband who was busy trying to work hard at his new job. My burdens were far too heavy for him to carry alone but I was in a dark valley and sinking under the weight of them. With friends hundreds of miles away, before cell phones & free long distance; my grief nearly overwhelmed me. **But God was faithful!**

It was years later before I came to see that it was God's *severe mercy* to strip away all I had depended on, so that I would come to know and depend on Him in ways I had never *needed* to before. Faithfully He carried me day by day, providing the grace I needed. When we moved back to this area 2 years later, I was not the same person who had left, for suffering had done its work and my heart was set more fully on God.

I say this because God often meets our needs in ways we don't expect because He knows our greatest need is Him! God has many things to teach us about ourselves and about Him through our valley of suffering, *one of which is to rely on His strength and not our own.*

It is through our *burdens* that we can share in the fellowship of *Christ's sufferings*. It is in our *pain that we get a glimpse of the cross*, tasting of the *loneliness Christ* experienced when His closest friends fell asleep in His darkest hour. It is as we grapple with the heartaches of loss, sickness, betrayal, & disappointment, that we *see more clearly the wretched depravity of sin* and God's mercy in sending His own Son to rescue us from our own wicked self-consumed hearts.

If we allow ourselves to be fixed on a certain person, or the church, to meet all of our needs, not only are we setting ourselves up for disappointment, we will miss the much more that God wants to give us. We must be careful we don't miss out on a blessing simply because it isn't packaged the way we expected!

God will use different means at different times to help us carry our burdens. In my life, God has used godly saints I have met in the pages of books, family members, old friends, new acquaintances, and even children! At other times, like Job's friends, people have actually *added to my burden* with misunderstanding, judgmental attitudes, or failing to hear my cries for help.

We will become bitter and resentful if we don't ultimately trust that God is our true Burden Bearer. Only *His* shoulders are big enough to carry us in the storms of life, and we can trust that He is fully committed to use every trial and difficulty to conform us to the image of His Son.

The Gospel tells us that our greatest problem isn't the trials we endure, but the sins we've committed against a holy God. We deserve God's judgment, not His help. Knowing that in Christ we have received "full redemption" (Psalm 130:7), we have confidence to wait for and trust in God, even when we don't understand our circumstances. In every way, we remain joyfully dependent on God's free grace.

God comforts us so that we can comfort others out of the strength and grace we have received from Him. I close with 2 Corinthians 9:8. "***And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.***" So as Paul encouraged the Galatians, I encourage you; "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9-10)