

Bear One Another's Burdens
Galatians 6:1-5

The June issue of Reader's Digest carried the story of an everyday hero named Charlotte. She's 19. It was Thanksgiving weekend and following dinner the family retired to the finished basement to relax while her father went to tinker in the attached garage. Around 8p.m. Charlotte went to check on her dad. The aroma of turkey and dressing still hung in the air as she passed through the kitchen on her way to the side door leading into the garage. Opening the door black smoke billowed into the kitchen. She found her way to her father lying on his back trapped under the frame of his Sierra truck. He had propped up the front end of the truck on a jack in order to have easier access to the brakes. Somehow the truck had slipped off the jack pinning his chest and shoulders with the wheel hub. Bare-footed, Charlotte ran to the front of the truck attempting to lift the vehicle off her father, who was giving her encouragement. With adrenaline flowing, "she tried again and was able to tip the truck backward just enough for her to prop it up with her right hip." She then grabbed her dad's 280 lb. frame and dragged him down the driveway. She then returned to the vehicle, started it and pressed on the gas pedal. The metal wheel loudly scraped against the concrete floor, but the vehicle slowly rolled out. Finally, she returned to the house and yelled for everyone to get out.

Our topic today is bearing or carrying the burdens of one another. Please open your Bible to Galatians 6:1-5.

This morning I would like to read an extended passage beginning with Galatians 5:16-6:5. If you are able please stand to honor God's Word from which we will talk about burden bearing.

First of all let's consider the principle of burden bearing.

In the original language this admonition is in the present active imperative mood making this an ongoing action, something that is continuous so that we would read it to mean "keep on bearing one another's burdens." It's the same word and idea conveyed in John 19:17 where we find Jesus carrying His cross to the place where He would be crucified.

The principle of burden bearing is a broad one meaning that it could apply to any and all burdens. Think for a moment about some of the burdens you carry or that others carry.

There may be financial burdens with a seemingly insurmountable debt looming over you. They could include student loans, overwhelming medical expenses, house repairs, mortgage or car payments. You may have the burden of caring for someone who is going through some physical difficulty which may be short term or long term. Some of you have cared for a loved one in their last days or months. Some of you are caring for a loved one. Some of you will be caring for a loved one.

I read a story that came out of China a number of years ago. As the story goes, a 2 year old boy fell off a table resulting in the boy going into a coma. When he woke 6 days later he could neither talk nor move. The distress of the mother was compounded by the fact that she was unable to afford a nursing home for his ongoing care. Rather than give up she took on that responsibility for her child. She did the unbelievable. She carried the son on her back. There are three remarkable feats that make this incredible. The first is that at the time of this story she was 65. The second is that he weighed over twice what she did. The third is that she did so for over 30 years.

There are burdens at work. Those may include unrealistic deadlines, an unreasonable boss or difficult co-worker. It may be the burden of travel. There are burdens of owning a home.

There burdens in relationships. Let's face it, even

good relationships take work, but couple that with other relationships that aren't going well can be a real burden. A family member is going through a divorce. A child may not be walking with the Lord as you had taught them. There may be a relationship with someone who has a dependency on you where they monopolize your time. It seems like every time you want to plan something they're at your door because they need someone to talk to, a shoulder to cry. They always have a crisis.

Those are just some of the burdens you bear.

The word burden literally means weight. It's used in Matthew 20:12 where workers complain about bearing the burden of the work from the beginning of the day.

But it's more than just a weight, it's a significant weight, something that is extremely heavy, more than can be carried alone.

I don't know if I should tell you this or not, but I have moved this pulpit by myself off the platform and back on. I figured out how to move it without little difficulty. Is it the best thing to do? Probably not. It's better with a couple people. Let me know if you would like a demonstration after the service.

Carrying a burden, especially one that is more than we can carry alone is much better with two or more sharing the load.

We find a similar principle found in the Old Testament. We can draw the principle of bearing the burdens of others from it.
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

I think you can see the comparison. With connectivity to the world at our fingertips through cell phones, texting, Facebook, instant messaging, twitter and the like where you can constantly be in touch with people you know, why is there such an increasing level of loneliness, discouragement,

depression and despair? I think it's because there is an underlying unwillingness to allow others to see our burdens. I think we're afraid to let people see we don't have it all together. We may be afraid they won't like us as much or that we'll be perceived as being weak.

We all have burdens of one kind or another and Paul's admonition is that we are called to bear those burdens so that the person doesn't have to go it alone.

Jesus called on His disciples to pray with Him when He was facing the reality of all the cross meant, bearing the burden of all sin for all mankind – past, present, and future.

Paul called on his friends to visit him when he was in prison as he awaited trial, not knowing what would result.

Moses bore the burden of bearing all the complaints of the Israelites as case after case came to him to be judged. His father-in-law recommended that he select godly men to help carry the burden.

We all have burdens and Paul says we are to bear them for others. The word bear means to take up with the hands in order to carry or bear away.

After I have cleared out the dead brush, I pick it up and bear it away to the burn pile.

That's the idea Paul conveys, to help carry away the burden of someone else.

In that dramatic scene of *Lord of the Rings – Return of the King*, Frodo is carrying the Ring of Power up Mt. Doom in order to destroy it and so end the terror of Sauron once and for all. He falls repeatedly and doesn't believe he can go any further. His energy is spent carrying the burden of the ring for all middle earth. His ever faithful companion, Samwise Gamgee responds by saying "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you." He picks Frodo up and begins to carry him up the rest of the way.

We may not be able to take the burden, but we can help them with it. But here's the thing – we'll never be able to bear burdens if others are unwilling to be open, honest, vulnerable, and transparent.

Often times we put on our happy faces offering a warm handshake or welcoming hug, but deep inside we feel pressed down by the burden, hoping that the pain or struggle isn't visible.

Folks we have to give that up. The body of Christ cannot function as the body of Christ if we're carrying around our burdens in secret. The body of Christ is to be there for one another.

We may walk with someone through the doors of the church and never know they are carrying a heavy burden, a burden they need help with. We may sit next to someone in church, singing the same songs, greeting them before the service begins and never know that they are carrying a heavy burden.

Maybe they are hoping that someone will come along and ask them so they can share. Maybe we're afraid to ask them because we don't want to get involved, after all, we have our own load to carry and no one is helping us.

In the broad understanding of what it is to be a body of believers we are to be burden bearers, assisting with any number of burdens and they can be whatever is going on in that person's life. It is a continuous action that includes seeing them through the burden. That means a measure of commitment.

Now, that said, let's look at the context, because there is a very specific type of burden that Paul refers to here. Let's read vs. 1-5 again.

In the context of the admonition we are considering the reference suggests burdens that tempt a sinning believer to fall back into the sin from which they have just been delivered. One author suggests that "a persistent, oppressing temptation is one of the

heaviest burdens a Christian can have."

That's why there are any number of addiction programs like alcoholics anonymous. One of my favorite Bugs Bunny episodes has Sylvester the cat going to a birds anonymous meeting because he wants to give up his addiction of trying to eat Tweety bird. Throughout the show other cats help him overcome his strong temptation to eat Tweety bird. In the end the leader of Birds anonymous gives in to his temptation and begins to chase Tweety.

Let me remind you again that as a body of believers we are to be about the spiritual well-being of others in the body which includes helping them face temptation and sin they may have committed.

We looked at verse 1 a few weeks ago, but let's come back to it for a moment. Talking to Christians, Paul is speaking about the one who has sinned. In this case the words he chooses are "someone caught or overtaken by a sin." They were caught red handed. The idea though is someone who was caught off guard by a sin versus a sin you planned to commit. Take for example, Judas who plotted to betray Christ and then followed through with it. On the other hand, you have Peter warming himself by a fire at the trial of Jesus. In his case he was overtaken by the sin of denying Jesus. It just came on him. Now in that moment, he could have made a different choice, but it caught him off balance and he lied.

Would it be safe to assume that we have all had that experience in our life? We didn't plan on it, but it came in so fast we got caught.

Paul's admonition is that those who are spiritual must come along and help bear that burden in order of helping them get back in a right relationship God, after all, as we see in verse 1 again, restoration is the goal which means that for restoration to happen repentance must happen first.

I want to share a true story that I hope will give you the sense of what Paul is conveying in verses 1-2.

Gene Getz shares a story that shocked him. During the middle of one of his services someone reported to him that a good friend had left his wife and six children and had moved into an apartment with the neighbor's wife. This man had been known as a stalwart Christian. He was a former missionary and now a successful Christian businessman. He served as a board member on several well-known Christian organizations. Getz initially thought it had to be a mistake.

Because he had finished his message he turned the remainder of the service over to another pastor, contacted one of the elders who also knew the man well and together went to his home. They found the man's wife in tears and the six children sitting on the floor, ages ranging from very young to teens. The neighbor's husband was also there but had obviously drunk too much as a way of coping with his grief. They did what they could to minister to the family and decided that they needed to confront the man the next day at his place of business.

When they arrived, the man was not in a receptive mood. He asked them to leave his office, stating that he had made up his mind, something he had been thinking about for some time. As lovingly as he could, Gene Getz told him they loved him too much to allow him to proceed on with this disastrous decision.

The man consented to talk outside the building only because his office was glassed in on all sides and the other employees could see what was happening although they could not hear. They only knew that something serious was happening and Getz and the other elder were not leaving. So he consented to a more private setting outside.

The man continued to pressure them to leave and in the intensity of the moment, Getz said he told the

man that if he wanted them to leave the man would have to deck him. He then said that in an elevated voice that they were there because they loved him and to help set him free from this horrible trap.

Again, he consented to a more quiet location to talk and went to a nearby restaurant where they got a corner booth. Again, they pleaded with him. The elder accompanying Getz at one point put his hand on the man and with tears pleaded for him to go to counseling. They would not let him go.

After about two hours of intense discussion, seeing they weren't planning on leaving, the man finally consented to see a Christian counselor. Getz and the other elder accompanied the man and his wife. In that meeting he decided on six weeks of counseling, but later admitted it was only to get them off his back.

During that six weeks they hadn't seen or talked with the man, but knew he was in counseling. One Sunday Gene Getz remembers leading a Sunday service, looking up and seeing the man and his wife entering the service. Following the service he went up to Gene and gave him a big hug and with tears streaming down his face told him how grateful to God he was that they didn't let him go.

They had eight more wonderful years of marriage before his wife died of cancer.

We can look back at the list of sins in verses 19-21 and conclude that there are some doozies. They cover the gamut. Paul's admonition is that we as fellow believers cannot overlook the sins of others. We have a responsibility to help them bear that, to help them through it and overcome it. We can conclude that it is the Holy Spirit's job to convince and convict of sin and yes, that's true, but He also uses people not only to confront someone who has been caught in sin or who is having a strong temptation in a particular area, but to help restore them, to help them through it.

That's what Nathan did with David.

That's what the Old Testament prophets tried to do with Israel.

If we really love our brother or sister in Christ, we will accept this admonition and help restore them. Certainly prayer is a powerful tool that can be used, but sometimes they need more than just prayer. They need to be able to call in the middle of the night and know you're there for them.

In the previous chapter Paul gives a clue as to those who are considered spiritual who are able to confront in a way that will help bear this burden. It is the responsibility of those who are spiritual. They are the ones producing the fruit of the Spirit. They are the ones walking in the Spirit. They are the ones who are being led by the Spirit.

We may love them by confronting them with their sin, but that may be the extent of it. We don't go to the degree Gene Getz and his elder went. So our reasoning goes something like this:

They've made up their mind.
They aren't going to change.
All I'll do is further infuriate them.

We can be firm but gentle, after all gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit and it is a duty of the godly Christian.

It can be painful.

It can take time.

We can be rejected.

But it is one of the greatest demonstrations of love.

We also must remember that there is potential risk to us as well, that we may fall into the same temptation. We are advised to be watchful.

I Corinthians 10:12

James 5:19-20

Are we willing to take that risk?

There probably isn't anything more difficult for a Christian, but we have a responsibility. Paul says in that way we fulfill the law of Christ.

Paul leaves no question about the issue – we have a responsibility to another believer who has sinned.

Do we love them enough?

Do we care enough?

We have the responsibility to bear one another's burdens.

The purpose is for restoration.

It could be restoration within a family.

It could be restoration with another Christian.

It certainly is restoration with the Lord.

Psalm 51:1-13

There is a third thought this passage shows us.

Not only do we have a responsibility.

Not only is it for the purpose of restoration, there is also to be a readiness.

That means we need to know one another.

We need to know them so we can see when they may have slipped into some sin.

We need to care enough that they have been overtaken in a sin.

The other day as I was driving down to church, there was a mourning dove in the middle of the road struggling. One of its wings had been injured and it was frantically trying to flap to get out of the road, but it couldn't. I kept going. As I drove on I asked myself why I wasn't concerned enough to stop the car and help the bird off the road. Here are some possible reasons.

There was too much traffic for me to risk stopping the car and helping the bird.

I had a busy day lined up and couldn't take a few extra minutes to help out.

It's not my responsibility. Someone else will stop and help the bird.

It's too late for the bird, nothing I do will help.

I'm sure eventually the bird will make it on its own.

I wonder if those are the same excuses we use for not bearing one another's burdens.

Think for a moment if Christ had used that rationale

when considering the burden of sin we carry. Like Charlotte's dad in the illustration I shared in the beginning, we are pressed down by a weight of sin that we cannot carry ourselves.

John Bunyan wrote about a dream in which he saw a man dressed in rags standing near his house. In his hand was a Book and on his back was a great burden. He began to read the Book and at one point began to weep inconsolably, so concerned was he about the great burden that was on his back. He then began a journey to be rid of the burden and had many difficulties along the way to get to the place of deliverance. Bunyan describes that as he climbed the hill and came to the cross the burden which had been so heavy all at once loosed from his shoulders and rolled back down the hill falling into a tomb where he saw it no more.

Days are filled with sorrow and care,
Hearts are lonely and drear;
Burdens are lifted at Calvary,
Jesus is very near.

Troubled soul, the Savior can see,
Every heartache and tear;
Burdens are lifted at Calvary,
Jesus is very near.

And then we sing:
Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood,
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful power in the blood.

Before we can bear one another's burdens we must first have our own burden born away through the power of Christ and His cross.

Have you had that burden carried from you? It is a burden we cannot carry ourselves. He came to remove it from you.

I Peter 2:24 "He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and

live to righteousness; for by His wounds you are healed."

Christ bore a burden that was not His own bearing the burden of our guilt and sin when He was put to death on the cross, so that those who place their faith in Him can have forgiveness and eternal life. "It wasn't convenient; it wasn't comfortable; it wasn't anything we can pay Him back for. It was a pure act of undeserved grace; given because of His [great] love for us."

Psalm 55:22 "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never let the righteous be moved."

When we carry the burden of another we are demonstrating love, we are demonstrating grace. When we carry the burden of another we are imitating Christ. There is the power in bearing the burden of another.

I want to end with this thought because some read into this passage a contradiction. Whereas in verse 1 we are told to bear the burdens of one another, in verse 5 it says to bear your own burden.

The easy answer is that Paul uses a different Greek word here. In verse 2 it's a burden too heavy to carry. In verse 5 it's the word for a backpack. There are some things we are called to carry ourselves.

The other night I was drained and I was having a little pity party, it's been a very busy week. Robyn asked if there was anything she could do to help me out. She wanted to carry some of my burden. I jokingly told her she could write the sermon. But that's my responsibility, a burden I can't carry. When Robyn was carrying David during pregnancy, I couldn't help out with that. That was hers to carry. Morning sickness was hers to carry and quite frankly I'm glad of it.

Now there were other things I could do to lighten her load, like doing dishes or running errands.

There are other burdens that you alone must carry.
 You can't get someone else to do your job, that's
 why you get paid.
 You can't have someone else take a test for you at
 school.
 You get the point.

One thing we have to carry ourselves is self-
 examination.
 Are we a Christian?
 If so, are we walking after or obeying Him?
 If not, why not and how do I change that?
 Is the fruit of the Spirit growing in me?
 Am I confessing my sin so that as a spiritual person
 I can bear the burden of another?

Paul is saying that we must think of ourselves in the
 right way in order to be able to bear the burdens of
 others. We cannot measure ourselves with others.
 Don't try to lighten the load of your own sin, by
 comparing yourself to someone else's. Our standard
 must be Christ. We have to accept the
 responsibility for our own spiritual growth in order
 to assist someone else with theirs. Our own pride
 will become a detriment both to ourselves and our
 ability to effectively bear the burden of someone
 else. We can become harsh, condescending,
 critical, complaining that they're moving too slow.

So how do we become a burden bearer?
 First, examine your own life.
 Second, always examine someone else's sin in the
 light of what Scripture says, not based on opinion,
 tradition, or cultural beliefs.
 Third, always approach another Christian following
 Biblical procedures.
 And throughout – pray.

We have a responsibility to bear the burdens of
 others that they might be restored and renewed in
 their growth of faith in Christ.
 God will give you grace needed to bear a burden.
 God's Spirit will give you the strength and spiritual
 fruit to help bear the burden.