

## Sharing Each Others' Burdens • Galatians 6:2

Jim Conway and I went to graduate school together. We even roomed together during one short session. Since then he has become a nationally known author and speaker on personal and family issues — especially mid-life crises and their impact on marriages and families.

Several years ago Jim's wife, Sally, was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. She was cancer-free for nearly five years. That was a critical mark because they had no health insurance and they expected that if she could be cancer-free for five years that they would again be eligible for health insurance. Days before that fifth anniversary another lump was discovered and it was determined that Sally's cancer had reappeared.

She was now in the midst of major cancer treatment with minimal financial resources, no health insurance and very large medical bills. To compound an already difficult situation, Jim was the caregiver and because he was self-employed he was unable to do his work and earn income.

He did something that many of us would probably find a difficult thing to do. He sent out a letter to all of his friends and acquaintances all over the country asking for financial help. Jim wrote a follow-up letter that told a story that I would like for you to hear:

*One of the many gifts that touched our hearts came from a Midwest family of four. They had been saving money to go to Disney World. The money had come to them as an unexpected gift, and they were planning to use it to experience the excitement of Disney World.*

*When the mother read the letter about Sally's cancer she felt strongly moved by God to talk to her husband and suggest that their Disney World money be used for Sally's medical expenses. But what would the kids, 9 and 11, say? They had been counting on this unusual opportunity.*

*During Thanksgiving dinner, the mother*

*read the letter to the children. She explained how much Sally meant to her and her father and how much they wanted to help. Then the parents threw out the question, "What would you think if we were to take the money that we were going to spend on Disney World and give it to the Conways for Sally's medical needs?" The kids felt it was the right thing to do, but in the midst of the discussion the 11-year old said, "I hope that God will forgive me because I'm selfish. I still want to see Disney World."*

*At that point the father said, "I believe we need to trust God with this issue. If God provides us with funds to go to Disney World, then we will clearly know that it is a special gift from God and it's not something of our own manipulation." Together they joined hands and prayed, giving this money for Sally's medical fund. At the same time, they expressed their deep wish to yet go to Disney World, but told God they wanted to follow His purpose.*

*When we received the check and the letter in our office telling this story we were just dumbfounded. No way were we going to accept this check. I called their home and talked to the mother. I said that we were sending the check back. We couldn't in good conscience take this fun trip away from the family. She said, "It's a family decision. If you send the check back we'll only have to mail it back to you. We believe God wants you to have it."*

Does that sound Christian to you? Listen to what the New Testament says:

**Romans 15:1-2:** "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

**I Corinthians 12:26:** "If one part [of the body of Christians] suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

**Galatians 6:2:** "Carry each other's burdens,

***... bearing burdens is a normal and an inevitable part of human life. Christians are not exempt from these burdens.***

*and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

There’s an underlying assumption in the Bible that some of us never quite get no matter how many times we hear it. It is that bearing burdens is a normal and an inevitable part of human life. Christians are not exempt from these burdens.

There are some Christians who think that something has gone terribly wrong if they have serious problems in life — so much so that when they encounter those difficulties they turn against God. They are greatly disappointed and often become angry with him.

My own experience is that I have never known anyone who did not have burdens. There have been those that I have observed, as you have, that seem to lead comparatively trouble free lives but often it is because we simply do not know. Sometimes those who seem to have perfect lives carry the heaviest loads. And if there are days when we think that we would exchange our problems for the problems of others, it’s evidence of how ignorant we are of the problems those others actually face.

Many of us fanaticize about perfect bodies, successful careers, ideal marriages, perfect children and perpetual happiness. We somehow talk ourselves into believing that life was meant to be burden free. When we lose jobs, have broken relationships, suffer miscarriages, get sick or face death, we feel terribly betrayed.

There are different responses to the burdens of life. Many of us ask, “Why me?” Others just ask, “Why?” We somehow feel that if God would just let us know the reason why things are going wrong that maybe that greater reason will carry us through.

Author and financial advisor Larry Burkett spoke at a publisher’s conference where he talked about his own serious cancer. He said that he has concluded that “Why did this happen to me?” is the wrong question for him to ask. Instead he asks, “Lord, what do you want me to do now?”

There’s an ancient proverb that says, “The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.” That is to say that the heat of the sun, the circumstances of life, beats down hard and regularly upon all of us. Some suffer more than others. Some have far heavier burdens. While we can’t always control life’s burdens, we do have a choice in terms of how

we respond or how we handle what comes our way. Clearly it is God’s desire that we respond Christianly — that is, that we respond to life’s problems in a manner like Jesus Christ. The Bible gives us a great deal of information about the problems that Jesus had. There is nothing that we face that he did not in some way himself face. His burdens in life were greater than anything that we will ever face. We are to respond to our problems like he did. That is what it is about to be a Christian.

When St. Paul talks about burdens in Galatians 6:2 telling us to carry each other’s burdens, he writes in a context of our sins more than our calamities. Galatians 6:1-2 tells us, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

To be sure, the burdens of life include sickness and other calamities, but this example is of sin. I’m taken aback by that because I may be uncomfortable enough having to tell you about problems in my life — things that I would prefer to keep private — but least of all would I be very anxious to ask you to carry my sins or the consequences of my sins. That seems too intimate, too private and personal.

It is important to understand the meaning of the word for “sin” in Galatians 6:1. Just as Eskimos have a lot of different words for snow, the Bible has a lot of different words for sin. In this example in Galatians the word for sin is not for a deliberate disobedience to God but a “slip up.” It’s something that someone has done that they shouldn’t have done, but it wasn’t particularly done with malice.

If you have ever experienced an ice storm, you know how difficult it makes it to get around. Automobiles crash; people fall.

In a similar way, we live in a world coated with sin. It doesn’t make any difference whether it’s at work, the shopping mall, church or at home, the world is slippery with sin and it’s very easy to just slip up and fall hard — sometimes with disastrous results. You might slip up and say something that’s inappropriate that costs you your job. It might cost you one of the most important relationships of life. Sometimes we can wreak our lives and severely

damage the lives of others by our unintentional words of unkindness, acts of malice or failure to love.

How are we going to cope with these burdens? It's a slippery world and burdens are inevitable, whether they come from what we have done to ourselves or what others have done to us. The Bible says that Christians bear these inevitable burdens in three different ways. One is that God helps us. That is the best of news — that God shares the burden with us and helps us through it. The second is that fellow Christians share our burdens and help us. The third way is that each of us carries our own load. That is to say that we are never to be irresponsible. Now that may seem like a little bit of a downer because when we struggle with life we like to have somebody else take care of us, but Paul says in Galatians 6:5 that “each one should carry his own load.” It doesn't mean that we do not trust God for help and it certainly does not mean that we refuse the help of others. It is the recognition that we are to be responsible to God for what he has enabled us to do. It is the recognition that many of the lessons of life are learned from the loads of life.

I have often asked Christians to tell about the experiences when they have felt closest to God and when they have learned life's most important lessons. Almost without exception the answer is a story about a time in life when the load was particularly heavy. Now none of us would choose that. No one prays that God would bring some horror into his life, but afterwards he sees that it was the time when God was closest to him.

God does not want us to miss out on the benefits of the difficulties, but he also does not want the weight of the difficulty to destroy us. So he helps us directly, but he also asks us to “carry each other's burdens” so that we can learn from each other. That means that we can learn what God is doing in somebody else's life and get the lesson without maybe going through it ourselves. It means that we can have the benefit of helping someone else who is really hurting. It means that we can be the agent of

Jesus Christ and experience some of what he experiences when he helps us. It means that we can obey what Jesus wants us to do.

If you add together what happens when Christians help each other, the total bottom line is more than the sum of each of the parts. Something supernatural happens! It is not magic. It is better than magic. It is the power of God.

When a Christian is lonely and desperate and another Christian comes along and gives encouragement and takes some of the burden, that is the power of God. When a Christian needs advice and counsel and another believer provides that kind of wisdom, it is the power of God. Or when any of us as Christians needs a listening ear to pour out our lives to and there's another Christian who will listen compassionately, that is the power of God. When a Christian needs food, clothing, a ride or a place to stay, it is the power of God when another Christian helps out.

Now in order for this to work, every Christian must be willing to share. It doesn't work if only a

few will actually do it. Every Christian must be willing to give away his or her problems and receive help, but it also means that every

Christian must be willing to carry someone else's problems and give help. When we all share each other's burdens, God gets involved in every transaction and adds whatever it takes to make it work.

So much for theory. What should we do? First of all, in order to share you must be connected. It's critically important to be connected with other Christians before calamity strikes. Now I know in a busy life there is always a temptation to simply come to church for an hour to love God and worship him but never to become connected with other Christians. That is not only contrary to the essence of what Christianity is all about but it also can be terribly detrimental when the time comes when we need others to help carry our burdens.

Who are the five Christians you know best? Have you helped them carry life's burdens? If at two o'clock tomorrow morning you are in the emer-

***God does not want us to miss out on the benefits of the difficulties, but he also does not want the weight of the difficulty to destroy us.***

gency room of a hospital and you need to call someone to come and be there with you and pray for you, could you call them? Think of those who would be most likely to give you a call if they faced that circumstance and desperately needed help. Are there people who will turn to you because they know they are connected to you and you are the kind of person that would carry somebody else's burden?

In John Kennedy's famous inaugural address he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Likewise, ask not what other Christians can do for you; ask what you can do for other Christians.

I would suggest preparing in advance. What about saving some money just for someone else's emergency? That may not be a suggestion you will hear from a financial planner but it is a marvelous act of Christian sharing. It can be as little as a five-dollar bill set aside in your wallet just to help someone in need. Or on a larger scale it may be a special bank account set aside to meet the needs of believers who have a particularly heavy burden.

Do the same thing with time. Just as you might schedule your vacation time to paint the house or to take a trip, what about setting aside two or three vacation days that you can take at any point simply to help out someone who is particularly burdened? Be on the lookout for someone who needs love, kindness and friendship.

Be careful always to carry the burdens of others with love and respect. Be the kind of Christian who keeps confidences, who never jokes about someone else's hurt and never take advantage of someone else's misery.

Don't expect anything in return when you are sharing. Understand that the way the system works is that you help carry my burden and I help carry his burden and he helps carry her burden. It is like a chain.

In the 1980's our family took a long road trip from Minneapolis to Phoenix, Arizona. We visited the Grand Canyon and a lot of other sights along the way. Late one afternoon we were traveling through an area of the Colorado Rockies called "Little Switzerland" near the town of Ouray. Our daughter Jill was driving our station wagon over Red Mountain pass, one of the more dangerous

passes in the Colorado Rockies at 11,008 feet, when the car stalled on a steep incline, disabling the power steering and power brakes. She was able to stop the car in the middle of the road, not far from a steep drop-off. Together we rolled the stalled car back across the road to a slightly wider spot and then as a family we prayed together. We asked that God would send us help because we really didn't know what to do.

Immediately at the conclusion of our prayer, a stranger stopped to offer help. He drove us in to the town of Ouray, connected us with a mechanic and took us to a motel. The next morning he drove us back up Red Mountain pass to our car. Then we noticed that it was parked right next to a plaque memorializing a pastor and his family who had died at that very spot! When I offered to pay him he said, "No, but I'll tell you what you can do. Someday you help out someone else." That's the essence of Christian sharing.

Our American culture has a sort of unwritten law that says that we're all supposed to be self-sufficient. We don't really want anybody else's help and we look down on other people who need help. We think that they have probably brought the problems on themselves. It's their own fault.

But as Christians that is not the way for us to live. Instead of the law of selfishness and independence, the Christian way is to "Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

*Faith Matters* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
612-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
©Leith Anderson