

Burden Bearing

• Lesson Three •

Burdens Also Come to Believers' Lives

1. Christians carry a unique set of burdens
2. A Christian's attitude toward burdens is unique

Worship

Believers are not immune to the burdens of life in this world. In fact, believers bear additional burdens because of their faith.

Read responsively from Psalm 5. These words are written by a person bearing the burden of persecution.

A: Give ear to my words, O LORD,

B: Consider my sighing.

A: Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,

B: For to you I pray.

A: Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies—

B: Make straight your way before me.

A: Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;

B: Their heart is filled with destruction.

A: Declare them guilty, O God!

B: Let their intrigues be their downfall.

A: Banish them for their many sins,

B: For they have rebelled against you.

A: But let all who take refuge in you be glad;

B: Let them ever sing for joy.

A: Spread your protection over them,

B: That those who love your name may rejoice in you.

A: For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous;

B: You surround them with your favor as with a shield.

Prayer: Lord, enable us to accept burdens that come on us for your sake. May faith in you and faithfulness to our calling be more important to us than any comforts or connections in this world. Amen.

Introduction

Patty worked as a job placement coordinator for a business school. In order to secure jobs for all the program's graduates, Patty's supervisor suggested she pad their resumés and grade records. Patty refused, saying it was against her principles. The supervisor insisted she do things his way or she would be replaced. When she still refused, he fired her.

Have you ever had to give up something in order to stay true to your Christian convictions?

Studying God's Word

Christians carry a unique set of burdens

When rains flood a town, both believers and unbelievers end up with water in their basements. When drought parches a region, lawns and farms dry up without regard for each person's religious beliefs. Christians and non-Christians alike suffer from sin's side effects.

But Christians also have other kinds of burdens to bear. Early in the fourth century, a series of edicts by Emperor Diocletian commanded that Christian churches be torn down, Scriptures be burned, and any who persisted in adherence to Christianity be locked up till they would offer sacrifices to pagan gods. The historian Eusebius reported, "Innumerable multitudes [of Christians] were imprisoned in every place . . . so that there was no room left for those condemned for crime" (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book VIII, chapter VI). Prison overcrowding was relieved only when a further edict commanded torture and death for any prisoners who would not honor the gods.

First century Christians in the Roman Empire could have avoided many problems if they had denied their faith in Jesus. But they confessed Christ and became victims of persecution.

When we follow Christ, there are special burdens that come on us. We call them crosses – the crosses of self-denial. The cross we bear is that we must set aside our will for God's will – a heavy burden to bear at times.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

1. Why should we not be surprised if we suffer rejection or ridicule on account of Christ?
2. What should not be the causes of a Christian's sufferings?
3. Reread verses 17 and 18. In your own words, what is being said in those verses?
4. What should we do if we suffer for the sake of Christ or our Christian principles?

His Word in My Life

You mustered the courage to join your church's evangelism committee. After several weeks of training, you feel ready to hit the streets. Going door-to-door, your first encounters are tolerable, even somewhat pleasant. Then you come upon an angry unbeliever. He curses at you. "You religious nuts make me so mad," he screams in your face. "You think you have all the answers and can tell the rest of us what to do." After several more accusations and expletives, he tells you to get off his porch.

Do you:

- a) quit canvassing and quit the evangelism committee?
- b) come back later and slash his car tires?
- c) go on your way praising God for the incident?

Refocus on the key point

Bearing the name of Christ makes us targets of animosity. Those who reject Christ will reject us; that is a burden we bear. But far better to suffer the world's wrath than go against God! "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

A Christian's attitude toward burdens is unique

Two men shared a hospital room at the cancer treatment center. Both men had the same disease. Both were receiving experimental treatments as their last hope.

One man was bitter and resentful. He never smiled. Family members visited only for short times because he was short-tempered and mean. He lashed out at them in frustration.

The other man was calm and in good spirits. He would laugh at jokes, sit up as long as he could to play with his grandchildren, and engage in conversation with the nurses.

Faith makes a difference in how we bear burdens. Christians have a unique mindset that allows burdens to be borne graciously.

Read Philippians 4:10-20.

1. What was the situation in which Paul found himself as he wrote to his church friends in Philippi? (see Philippians 1:12,13)
2. Paul says he was content under those circumstances. How is that possible?
3. Compare Paul's attitude to what you would expect from an average jail inmate.
4. Note what the Philippians had done for Paul during his difficulties. How can Christians help each other keep a positive spiritual attitude during times of suffering or persecution?

His Word in My Life

Heather was feeling left out. Other moms in the PTA had lavish wardrobes. They drove expensive sport-utility vehicles. They belonged to the country club. Heather became envious of their lifestyles. She wanted to be like them. She became depressed about her mundane, middle class life.

What aspects of a Christian attitude toward life would make Heather feel less burdened?

Refocus on the key point

In one of Jesus' parables, he compared the faith of some to a plant that is choked off by the worries, riches, and pleasures of life (Luke 8:14).

But faith that remains grounded in Christ gives us a unique attitude toward these troubles and temptations. We cast our cares and worries on God, knowing he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). We focus not on riches and pleasures—earthly things—but on Christ and things above. (see Colossians 3:1-4)

Thus Christians are unique "plants" in this world, growing strong and firmly rooted in the grace and goodness of God.

Summary

Frequently imprisoned, severely whipped and beaten on numerous occasions, pounded with stones until nearly dead, fleeing from riots and death threats, shipwrecked three times . . . does this sound like the life of a happy, contented man?

When the apostle Paul told of those experiences (2 Corinthians 11:16-33), he wasn't complaining. He was boasting—praising God that these things had happened to him.

Paul was happy and content in his life even when suffering miserably, even when being persecuted for his faith. Faith is what made him able to endure all things. God's strength sustained him; God's integrity guaranteed hope.

Think of the last time you were faced with unhappy circumstances. Evaluate your attitude in dealing with them.

Life with God

- Day 1: Read Revelation 2:8-11 and memorize the last part of verse 10. Compare what persecuted Christians in Smyrna would suffer versus blessings God said they would receive.
- Day 2: Read Job chapter 15. Why did Job's friends keep haranguing him in his misery?
- Day 3: Read Job chapters 16 and 17. Summarize Job's comments as to why his friends' speeches gave him no comfort.
- Day 4: Read Job chapter 18. What Bildad says about the fate of a wicked man is accurate. Why was it the wrong thing to say to Job? (Consider also the general question: When is the right time for law, and when is the right time for gospel?)
- Day 5: Read Job chapter 19. What was the one thing that gave Job hope? Memorize verses 25 and 26.
- Day 6: Read Job chapter 20. Imagine yourself as Zophar. Your friend Job had just made an inspiring confession of resurrection faith. How might you have responded differently?
- Day 7: Read Job chapter 21. "Look at me!" Job says. Do you find it difficult to look directly at those who are disfigured with deformity or disease? How would Jesus look at them?