

Handling Life's Burdens.

In Psalm 55 verse 22 we read, "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you". The word `cares` carries the idea of burdens that we carry. Life brings many heavy burdens to us. Job said in Job chapter 5 verse 7, "Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward". He said in Chapter 14 verse 1, "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble". The weight of our burdens and troubles differ from one person to the next. Some are carrying burdens unknown to us. But we all carry burdens of one type or another.

Burdens come in a variety of ways. Family life brings its own burdens. There is sickness, poverty, redundancy, and broken relationships. Holding your job down brings the burden of deadlines, expectations, profits and production. Working for the Lord has its burdens. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 28, "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressures of my concern for all the churches".

Burdens can arise within friendships. In Psalm 55 verses 12 and 13, David says, "If an enemy were insulting me I could endure it but it is you my companion".

We experience physical burdens because of weakness and infirmity. Paul speaks about his thorn in the flesh. He says in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7 that it was, "A messenger of Satan to torment me". God assures him in verse 9. He says, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness".

We carry temperamental burdens. We become prone to depression and worry. There's the burden of bereavement. In John chapter 11 we read of the death of Lazarus. In verse 19 we read, "and many Jews had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them in the loss of their brother".

Disappointment can be a burden. We read in Luke chapter 24 verse 17 of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are on their way home after the events of the crucifixion of Jesus. We read, "They stood still their faces downcast". They thought that Christ hadn't risen and were disappointed.

The heaviest burden of all is the burden of sin. We read in Romans chapter 3 verse 23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. This burden has an impact on this life and the next. It separates you from God now, and will do for eternity unless you repent and turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

How should you respond to life’s burdens? We see in Psalm 55, first of all, some wrong responses. David says in verse 1, “Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea”. There’s the danger of doubting that God is there with you when troubles come. You may be tempted to doubt he’s listening to your prayers, and that he really cares about you at all. There’s no relief in doubt.

We can allow ourselves to despair. David did this. He says in verse 5, “Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me”. He began to feel there was no way out. There’s the temptation to complain about your burdens. David says in verse 2, “My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught”. You won’t find help in wallowing in self-pity. There’s the attractive proposition of giving up. David says in verse 6, “oh! That I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest”. The problem is that no matter where you go you take you with you and the burdens as well! Peter Marshall once said, “When we long for life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure”. Psalm 55 also provides us with the right response to life’s burdens. The first is acceptance. The word “Care” or “Burden” in verse 22 literally means, “that which he has given you” or “gift” in the original Hebrew. That throws our burdens into a completely different light.

I wonder if you have ever considered that burdens are a gift from God. Someone once said, “Our divine teacher has written lessons on the blackboard of trouble”. Your burden hasn’t come because you’re going through a patch of bad luck. Many put it down to that in the world. Burdens come so that we are drawn closer to God through them. The Devil may be behind it, but only as far as he has permission from your heavenly Father. God’s purpose is to bring good out of it for your blessing and his glory. When things are going well we may be inclined to forget God. Affliction has been described as “God’s sheepdog to drive us back into the fold”. David said in Psalm 119 verse 67, “before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word”.

David saw the value in God's gift of a burden. He says in verse 71, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees". Burdens rightly used become learning curves in our relationship with God. The ABC of spiritual growth is Adversity Builds Character.

Then there must be the act of casting. The word "cast" in verse 22 means to "fling" or "hurl". It's a word calling for effort on your part. God doesn't want you to face the burdens of life alone. He wants to be your helper and comfort. He gives us the burdens so that we might look to him in them and prove his grace and strength. He allows burdens so that we might throw them back at him, and find that grace to help in time of need. How could we ever know God as the God of comfort if we were never uncomfortable? Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of verse 22 says, "pile your troubles on God's shoulders-he'll carry your load, he'll help you out".

The final thing is to leave your burden with the Lord. It's right to pile your troubles on the Lord. The problem is when we leave the place of prayer we pick them up again! We need to learn the lesson of actually leaving them with the Lord. God takes responsibility for our burdens the moment we cast them on him. The story is told of a plumber who was working on restoring an old farmhouse. During his first day he lost an hour because his tyre went flat, his drill packed in, and his truck wouldn't start when it was time for home. The farmhouse owner gave him a lift home. As he travelled the plumber looked down and dejected, and never spoke a word. The plumber invited his friend in to meet the family. As he approached the house he stopped at a small tree in his garden. He cupped his hands and touched the tip of the branches. When he entered the house he was transformed. He embraced his wife and kissed his children. He walked his friend back to the car who couldn't resist asking the plumber why he touched the tree on the way in. The plumber said, "Oh that's my trouble tree. I'm aware that I can't help having troubles in my job, but I make it a policy never to take them home to my wife and children. So I just hang them up on the tree every night and ask God to take care of them. I pick them up again in the morning but often find they aren't as many there as I hung up the night before".

When you face life's burdens remember these truths. Also bring to mind these words of a hymn:

Fear not I am with thee, O, be not dismayed
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.