

Properly Handling Your Overwhelming Prayer Burden

Remember Oscar the Grouch? The green, grumpy muppet of Sesame Street fame who lived in a garbage can was quite comfortable in his trashy home, collecting the rubbish of passers-by. If he didn't like what he encountered on the street or with people, he would slam down that metal lid and retreat into his cave of trash. Even though his lifestyle made him dirty and stinky, he preferred it that way. But why would anyone want to live in a can, surrounded by everyone else's refuse?

Barbara the burden-bearer shares some things in common with Oscar. As a highly sensitive, empathetic person, she may be loaded down with other people's garbage, hiding inside her can where she feels protected, perhaps even barking in irritation at the people around her, like the infamous Grouch. She may be comfortable there because it's familiar, it seems safe or it feeds her identity in some defiled way. Being surrounded by the community trash has a way of making one grumpy and reclusive. But Barbara isn't meant to be an Oscar the Grouch. She's meant to be a princess, a daughter of the King.

I have a friend who is working through her can full of trash, like Oscar. God, in His wonderful creativity, showed her an image of her highly sensitive, burden-bearing nature. A trash can with a wide opening at the top for receiving burdens and a small opening at the bottom for releasing them. She simply couldn't offload them quickly enough to keep them from piling up. So she spent her life feeling overwhelmed by the weight of empathy, intercession and the compulsion to fix things for people. Fortunately for this friend, the Lord is showing her the secret motivations of her heart that have kept the burdens flooding in but trickling out. He is revealing, through His great love, the reasons taking on other people's burdens has fed into her sense of value and identity. Offloading those

burdens to the cross where they belong grants clarity to see herself more clearly—to discover who she is truly designed to be. It is setting her free to love and to be loved, in purity.

“Highly sensitive,” “burden-bearing,” “extreme empathy,” whatever you want to call it—simply put, you feel deeply, you hurt, and you don’t know what to do about it.

“Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:4-5).

Where would we be if Jesus, the ultimate burden-bearer, hadn’t come to Earth and taken all our burdens and sins to the cross? I shudder to think where I would be without Him! And yet, so many Christians are still suffering under the weight of unnecessary burdens, not knowing the reality that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (see Matt. 11:30). They are like a community of Oscars living underneath lids of pain and suffering.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

In the mystery of the corporate nature of God, He asks us to take part in His very nature of love, to bear one another’s burdens. Some of us are naturally inclined to do just that. Our spirits “absorb” the pain and suffering of others as we empathetically identify with them. It is part of our spiritual DNA and is done mostly without our conscious knowledge. We know when there is a “disturbance in the force”; we become exhausted when wandering through shopping malls, we feel weepy when sitting next to the single mom at church, we feel the defilement on the land—the list can go on. When we don’t understand this gift, we tend to suffer under the weight of what we feel, and it can often be tormenting.

God is relational. He wants us to partner with Him. He desires that we love one another like He loves us. "Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

One way to lay down your life – to love as He loves – is to bear one another's burdens. What does that mean? It means to empathetically identify with someone's pain and carry it to the cross of Jesus through prayer. For example, you may feel anxiety one day for no apparent reason. When you pray for clarity, your friend Susie comes to mind. So you call to check on her. You find that Susie is devastated because her husband has asked for a divorce. So you begin to cry out to God on her behalf. Susie feels the love of God through your touch and intercession and is able to receive His strength to move through this challenge in her life. And you have had the opportunity to partner with God to usher His love and care to His daughter. There are many ways the gift can operate in and through you. When done properly, it is light and easy, as you are entering His yoke, His strength, His love and His call. When done in the flesh, it is heavy, emotional, damaging and tormenting.

Too many of us suffer under the weight of what we feel and sense. Too many of us don't understand what to do with what we feel. Too many of us stuff it into our guts until we want to burst under the weight and pain of it.

Oscar becomes grumpy.

Well, there is good news. You don't have to suffer under the weight of it. You don't have to live in the trash can.

I am one such Oscar. A burden-bearer by design, I lived the life of excessive sensitivity. I had the advantage of a degree of understanding that comes with being the daughter of John and Paula Sandford, founders of Elijah House Ministries. I knew I was a burden-bearer. I understood the concept. But

still, I couldn't seem to empty that dreaded trash can.

After I cried out to God in desperation, He graciously took me through a very intense season of healing for the excessive burden-bearing I've done in my life. That two-year season birthed a book. That book contains keys to help you discover many of the reasons you are living in your own trash can and will help you to give the trash to Jesus and come out of the stinky can into the beauty of the freedom of His love and grace. The fragrance of heaven will be released as you allow His Spirit to search your heart and bring healing.

You will discover what the light and easy yoke of Jesus really looks like. And you will be an Oscar no more.

I bless each of you into your journey of discovery and release. You are loved! {eoa}

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