

Sermon preached by David at St Alban's Church on Sunday 14.07.19

Help and Hope for the Heavy-Hearted

Can you remember a time when you have felt over-loaded? Perhaps carrying home too many bags of heavy shopping or going on holiday dragging heavy suitcases. What a relief when you are able to put your burdens down!

All of us have times in life when we carry heavy burdens of an emotional or spiritual nature. These can include:

- suffering, illnesses and disabilities,
- sorrows and grief,
- worries and responsibilities
- temptations and doubts
- weaknesses and failures

in fact any load that is hard to bear, that weighs our spirits down or causes our hearts to sink.

How do you cope with heavy burdens? The Bible gives us good advice and provides help and hope for the heavy-hearted. I want to focus on two pieces of advice, one from Paul and one from Jesus.

Share your burdens with friends

In Galatians 6:2 Paul says "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." We all like to be independent and self-sufficient, not relying on other people, but there are often times in life when we need to share our burdens with others because they are too heavy for us to carry alone. "A problem shared is a problem halved."

"Friendship divides your sorrows and multiplies your joys." Last Sunday one of the congregation here at St Alban's shared her concerns with two people after the service. We were able to sit with her and pray together, sharing the burden. After the same service we had a celebration meal with another member of the congregation congratulating him on his recent success. We can enjoy the benefits of both suffering together and rejoicing together.

Share your burdens with Jesus

In Matthew 11:28 Jesus says “Come to me all who are weary and carry heavy burdens... and I will give you rest.” Jesus wants to be our constant companion and partner through all of life’s joys and sorrows. He gives the example of a yoke of oxen, where the two animals are yoked together and share the load. When we come to Jesus he lifts the weight of burdens from our shoulders. One of my grandmother’s favourite hymns was “What a friend we have in Jesus”. It contains these words:

*Are we weak and heavy laden
Cumbered with a load of care...
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Here is good biblical advice that is simple to follow. When you are carrying heavy burdens, don’t struggle on alone. **Share your burdens with friends and share your burdens with Jesus.** We can do this easily by praying together and our Home Groups provide an excellent regular opportunity to do this.

The Bible particularly mentions 3 burdens that you need not carry:

- **Anxiety and worry.** In 1 Peter 5:7 we read “Give all your anxieties to God, for he cares for you.” We have a gate from our back garden on to a lovely playing field which we have used for 35 years and now the owners are proposing to fence us in. When we received a long legal letter on Friday we were able to share it with our neighbours but more importantly lay it before God in prayer.
- **Trouble and distress.** A few years ago I became very ill when the mitral valve of my heart collapsed and I was near death. I received many notes of encouragement while waiting for an emergency operation including one from my Aunt Iris. In it she quoted from Psalm 138:8, “Though I am surrounded by troubles... the Lord will fulfil his purpose for my life.” The words lifted my spirit.

- **Sin and guilt.** Many people struggle under the weight of sin and guilt, some even committing self harm or suicide. Jesus died on the cross to take this burden away from each one of us. In the story of Pilgrims Progress, the main character struggles on his journey with a huge burden on his back. Eventually he comes to the hill of Calvary and as he looks at the cross the burden falls away from his shoulders and rolls down the hill into the mouth of an open tomb. When we come to Jesus he removes the weight of sin and guilt from our lives.

Whatever burden you may be carrying this morning, you do not need to struggle on alone. In faith, bring all your concerns to God. Jesus says to you: "Come to me all who are weary and carry heavy burdens... and I will give you rest."

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit;
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble any where?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
You will find a solace there.*