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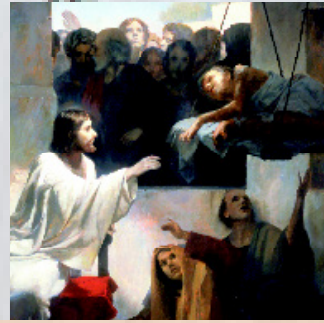
BEARING One Another's Burdens

From an address given to LDS Family Services employees in June 2017. Elder Holland adapted this version for a broader audience.

The Apostle Peter wrote that disciples of Jesus Christ are to have “compassion one of another” (1 Peter 3:8). Many of you fulfill that commandment honorably and admirably every day of your lives. Certainly, the need for compassion is as great today as it ever has been. Current data suggests that approximately one in five adults in the United States (43.8 million people) experiences mental illness every year.¹ Pornography abounds, with one website receiving over 23 billion visits in 2016 alone.² “Two-parent households are on [a precipitous] decline in the United States as divorce, . . . cohabitation, [and out-of-wedlock births] are on the rise. . . . Today fully four-in-ten births occur to women who are single or living with a non-marital partner.”³

To be called the Savior’s people and to stand in His Church, we must be “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [be] willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things” (Mosiah 18:8–9).

For me, bearing another’s burden is a simple but powerful definition of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. When we seek to lift the burden of another, we are “saviours . . . on mount Zion”



We may not be able to alter the journey, but we can make sure no one walks it alone. Surely that is what it means to bear one another's burdens.



PHOTOGRAPH FROM GETTY IMAGES
DETAIL FROM CHRIST AND THE PALSED MAN, BY J. KIRK RICHARDS



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(Obadiah 1:21). We are symbolically aligning ourselves with the Redeemer of the world and His Atonement. We are “bind[ing] up the brokenhearted, . . . proclaim[ing] liberty to the captives, and . . . opening . . . the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

Divine Empathy

Let’s stay with this matter of Christ’s Atonement for a moment. If I understand the doctrine properly, in the experience of the Atonement, Jesus Christ vicariously experienced—and bore the burden of—the sins and sorrows and troubles and tears of all mankind, from Adam and Eve to the end of the world. In this, He Himself did not actually sin, but He felt the pain and consequence of those who did. He did not personally experience a broken marriage, but He felt the pain and consequence of those who do. He did not personally experience rape or schizophrenia or cancer or the loss of a child, but He felt the pain and consequence of those who do, and so on and on through the litany of life’s burdens and broken hearts.

That view of how the Atonement works suggests the one true divine example of *empathy* the world has ever known. Obviously, no word does justice to the universe’s most consequential act, but today I don’t have a better substitute, so I will use it.

Empathy is defined as “the action of understanding . . . and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another

of either the past or present.”⁴ As already noted, that is actually a reasonably good statement of the atoning process, especially if we add “future” to “past” and “present.”

We all know that too many of God’s children do suffer silently and alone. Take, for example, a young man who wrote me expressing his testimony in a remarkably articulate letter but then adding that his heart breaks because he does not see any fulfillment or future joy for him as a person with same-sex attraction:

“I face a lifetime of lonely nights and dreary mornings. I attend my YSA ward faithfully and each week leave church knowing that I can never really fit in. I will never teach my son to ride a bike. I will never feel my baby girl hold my finger as she learns to walk. I will never have grandchildren.

“I will come home to an empty house, day after day, month after month, decade after decade, anchored only by my hope in Christ. Sometimes I wonder why He would do this to me and ask me to make such an impossible sacrifice. I cry at night when nobody can see. I have not told anybody, not even my parents. They and my friends . . . would reject me if they knew, just as they all have rejected those who have walked this path in front of me. I will live life at the margins. I have the option of either being harassed and avoided for being single, or pitied and ignored for telling the reason. Life looms long before me. Is there no balm in Gilead?”⁵

With so much pain and despondency, so much hopelessness, one thing we certainly





ought to try to give such a person is the reassurance that he is not alone. We should be adamant in stressing that God is with him, angels are with him, and we are with him.

Empathy. Sounds pretty inadequate, but it is a place to start. We may not be able to alter the journey, but we can make sure no one walks it alone. Surely that is what it means to bear one another's burdens—they *are* burdens. And who knows when or if they will be lifted in mortality. But we can walk together and share the load. We can lift our brothers and sisters as Jesus Christ lifted us (see Alma 7:11–13).

And through all of this, we certainly gain new and brighter appreciation for what the Savior ultimately does for us. As I once said:

“In striving for some peace and understanding in these difficult matters, it is crucial to remember that we are living—and chose to live—in a fallen world where for divine purposes our pursuit of godliness will be tested and tried again and again. Of greatest assurance in God's plan is that a Savior was promised, a Redeemer, who through our faith in Him would lift us triumphantly over those tests and trials, even though the cost to do so would be unfathomable

for both the Father who sent Him and the Son who came. It is only an appreciation of this divine love that will make our own lesser suffering first bearable, then understandable, and finally redemptive.”⁶

We learn quickly that our best and most selfless services are often not adequate to comfort or encourage in the way people need. Or if we succeed once, we often can't seem to repeat it. Nor are we superheroes at preventing regression in those we care about. All this is why we must ultimately turn to Jesus Christ and rely on Him (see 2 Nephi 9:21).

Often enough we can't help—or at least can't sustain our help or can't repeat it when we do sometimes succeed. But Christ can help. God the Father can help. The Holy Ghost can help, and we need to keep trying to be Their agents, helping when and where we can.

Refortify Yourself

For those of you who earnestly seek to bear another's burdens, it is important that you refortify yourself and build yourself back up when others expect so much of you and indeed take so much out of you. No one is so strong that they do not ever feel fatigued or frustrated or recognize the



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need to care for themselves. Jesus certainly experienced that fatigue, felt the drain on His strength. He gave and gave, but there was a cost attached to that, and He felt the effects of so many relying on Him. When the woman with an issue of blood touched Him in the crowd, He healed her, but He also noted “that virtue had gone out of him” (see Mark 5:25–34).

I have always been amazed that He could sleep through a storm on the Sea of Galilee so serious and severe that His experienced fishermen disciples thought the ship was going down. How tired is that? How many sermons can you give and blessings can you administer without being absolutely exhausted? The caregivers have to have care too. You have to have fuel in the tank before you can give it to others.

Rosalynn Carter, board president of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving, once said, “There are only four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.”⁷

Obviously, “the relationship between a caregiver and care receiver is a [serious one, even a] sacred one.”⁸ However, as we experience the challenge of bearing one another's burdens, we can remember that none of us are immune from the impact of empathizing with the pain and suffering of someone about whom we care.

Seek Balance

It is important to find ways to balance your caregiving role with other aspects of your life—including work, family, relationships, and activities you enjoy. In a general conference talk on this subject, I tried to “pay tribute to all of you, to all who do so much and care so deeply and labor with ‘the intent to do good.’ So many are so generous. I know that some of you [may struggle emotionally or financially] in your own lives and still you find something to share [with others]. As King Benjamin cautioned his people, it is not intended that we run faster than we have strength and all things should be done in order (see Mosiah 4:27).”⁹ But despite that, I know that many of you run very fast and that your energy and emotional supply sometimes registers close to empty.

When the problems seem too large, remember these lines from an essay by David Batty:

“Hope is not a feeling—it's not a tidal wave of joy in the middle of a problem.

“. . . Hope is not the magic wand that makes the problem disappear. Hope is the lifeline that can keep you from being overwhelmed by the storms in your life.

“When you place your hope in Jesus, you place your confidence in His promises that He will never leave you or forsake you—that He will do what is best for you. Even though you may be in the middle of a huge problem, hope enables you to be at peace, knowing that Jesus is with you every step of the way.”¹⁰

I love how Paul dealt with this struggle and feeling of inadequacy. In the scriptures,



the Lord explained that His grace was sufficient for Paul and that, in fact, His strength was actually “made perfect in weakness.” Then Paul wrote, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).¹¹



Trust the Father and the Son

We must trust that our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ truly care about us and what we are doing, that They want us to be made “perfect in weakness”—just what you want for those for whom you care.

I bear witness that God is aware of our burdens and will strengthen us to strengthen others. This does not mean our problems will always disappear or the world will suddenly be at peace. But neither do your prayers fall on deaf ears. And neither do the prayers of those you care for—the widowed, the divorced, the lonely, the overwhelmed, the addicted, the ill, the hopeless—everyone.¹²

Brothers and sisters, the service we provide when we bear another’s burdens is crucially important—literally the work of the Master. The number of letters received in my office underscores how much help is needed. That help is manna from heaven to those who struggle.

I said once: “When we speak of those who are instruments in the hand of God, we are reminded that not all angels are from the other side of the veil. Some of them we walk with and talk with—here, now, every day. Some of them reside in our own neighborhoods. Some of them gave birth to us, and in my case, one of them consented to marry me. Indeed heaven never seems closer than when

we see the love of God manifested in the kindness and devotion of people so good and so pure that *angelic* is the only word that comes to mind.”¹³

To me, when you strive to lighten another’s burdens, you are truly angels of mercy in the most literal sense. May you receive back a hundredfold all that you try to give. ■

NOTES

1. See “Mental Health by the Numbers,” National Alliance on Mental Illness, nami.org.
2. See “World’s Largest Porn Site Reveals the Most-Searches Porn Genre of 2016,” Fight the New Drug, Jan. 9, 2017, fightthenewdrug.org.
3. “Parenting in America,” Pew Research Center, Dec. 17, 2015, pewsocialtrends.org; see also D’Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, “10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World,” Pew Research Center, Mar. 31, 2016, pewsocialtrends.org.
4. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. [2003], “empathy.”
5. Personal correspondence.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 40.
7. See rosallyncarter.org/UserFiles/Jensen.pdf; see also Rosalynn Carter, in Randi Kaplan, “How to Care for the Caregiver,” May 13, 2015, health.usnews.com.
8. Nancy Madsen-Wilkerson, “When One Needs Care, Two Need Help,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2016, 38.
9. Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Handful of Meal and a Little Oil,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 31.
10. David Batty, “Finding Hope in the Midst of Life’s Problems,” livingfree.org.
11. See Anne C. Pingree, “Making Weak Things Become Strong,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2004, 28–30.
12. See Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 6–9.
13. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Ministry of Angels,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 30.