

## Chapter Six

# BURDEN

I well remember the evening when I asked the Lord to give me a burden for young people. I was a school teacher with the British Forces in Germany and felt the inadequacy of my verbal witness to the students, so cried out in prayer for the burden that I assumed would give me the motivation to witness more. I saw no immediate response but did exercise more courage in speaking to some of them.

Three years later, we were back in our home in Wales and I was teaching at a local Grammar School. Some teenage girls used to call in at our home on their way home from school, so Anne suggested that she should do a little Bible study with them once a week. They eagerly agreed, and soon the group included boys and had grown to double figures, so I found myself taking over the leadership, preparing Bible studies and planning other activities. Two years later, we had seen many young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty eight, come to faith in the Lord,. Two churches in our city had been revitalised and the impact on the surrounding community was considerable. It was not that I was an evangelist - far from it, but the young people led their friends to faith in Christ and I simply 'pastored' them, with a *carte blanche* given me by the elders of our church. Some years later, one of those young men, now in full-time ministry for the Lord, said "We were in revival and we didn't recognise it!" It was normal for us to see new believers most weeks. I ate, drank, slept and lived, youth work, every spare moment of my day, - and I never got weary! - (and I never felt the need to be paid!)

When I became a pastor many years later, Anne was asked what the differences were in being a pastor's wife now, having been a teacher's wife for so long. Her reply was that I was now doing full-time what I had spent all my spare time doing before!

There would be times when, after a tiring day at work, I would be called from my bed in the early hours of the morning because one of the young people were going through some trouble and needed help - now! I would put my trousers over my pajamas, get in my car and find the troubled youth, arriving back home some hours later, to crawl into bed for a brief sleep before leaving for school. The amazing thing was that, next evening I was not tired and did not feel any need to go to bed early to catch up on sleep. This happened a few times until we recognised it as an unusual refreshing from the Lord.

Jesus said "*Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"<sup>1</sup>

I was to speak for four evenings at a large church in Brazil. My host pastor came to the YWAM compound where I was staying, in order to drive me to his church. He was about half my age, very personable and spoke English very well.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:29

“Pastor Gareth” he said, “How do you keep going as actively as you do?” “You seem to have boundless energy while I am exhausted leading my church.” He went on to tell how he was at the church every morning at 6.30am for prayer and did not arrive home each evening until after 11pm, having locked up the building following the (nightly) meeting.

Having assured him that I also get weary so need to rest during the day, I asked him whose church He was building. “Why, the Lord’s of course!” he replied. I suggested that it wasn’t the Lord’s church that he was building, but *his own* for the Lord Himself has said, that ‘*My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*’ I do not understand how so many pastors have physical breakdowns when they are co-workers with Christ - yoked to Him - and His burden is light! Please don’t tell me that it is *always* because Satan attacks them just because of their position as pastors! He doesn’t need to come against them when they are trying to build God’s kingdom by their own strength and programs. He is not afraid of such a church! He only fears the church of which Jesus said, “I will build MY church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it!”

I suggested to my Brazilian friend that he would be better occupied releasing others in his congregation to help carry the load as the Lord had equipped them and intended them to do. By doing all the work himself, he was thwarting the purposes of the Lord for that congregation. His own personal burden and obvious gifting was as a worship leader, but the constraints of all the other work he felt he must do as pastor, robbed him of the joy that he would have had ministering in his gifting, and robbed the church of an *anointed* access into the presence of the Lord through praise and worship.

When we are yoked together with him, we share His burden. His burden for me was youth ministry; for the apostle Paul it was preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles; for Jacky Pullinger it was the drug addicts of The Walled City, Kowloon; for Hudson Taylor it was the heathen of China; for John Wesley it was the unchurched of England; for Chuck Colson it was the inmates of American prisons; for .....

What is His burden for YOU?

He has a burden for you and is waiting for you to take it up. Sadly, many who have deep burdens in the Lord’s work often expect others to carry them. “That’s the pastor’s job! Why isn’t he doing something about it? There’s a terrible problem in this city with youth gangs. Why isn’t the church doing something about it?” Why aren’t you? Certainly we are to ‘carry one another’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2) when those burdens are some weight of grief, but when the burden is a ministry burden from the Lord, ‘let every man carry his own burden’ (Gal 6:5). When we try to put our burdens on others we are acting just like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They were always telling others what they should be doing, so that Jesus said of them, “They tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders.”<sup>2</sup> When another person puts his/her ministry burden upon you, it can become very heavy; only the burden that Jesus has for you, will be ‘light’.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 23:4

How sad it is that we who are church leaders are often the first to put 'our burden' on others, sometimes using manipulation, flattery or guilt to get them to do our will.

"John, we need another Sunday school teacher and I believe you're just the right man for the job!" If John is 'just the right man', he should also have a burden for that work.

"Mary, a group of the ladies are starting to do house-to-house visitation to invite people to our services. I'm sure we can count on you not to let us down."

Of course, if John and Mary are asked to do these 'ministries', they can always agree to do so, even without a 'burden', as an act of faithfulness in serving the church (and hopefully, the Lord), but they must make sure they do not tie themselves into commitments which might be a barrier to the Lord's calling them into some other ministry which is His true burden and purpose for them. John might answer, "Yes, pastor, I'll be willing to teach a Sunday school class for a while. I shall commit myself for the next three months, repeatable for other three month periods, until the Lord makes it clear to me that He has another ministry more appropriate to my burden". Sadly, many pastors see this as a lack of commitment! To whom?

Jim was a young man with a burden. Every weekend, he and two friends would pray through the entire Friday night before spending the next day on the streets of our city, witnessing to whomever they could engage in conversation. The pastors respected Jim's work and were happy to allow him to attend their monthly ministerium meetings, even though he neither belonged to nor attended a local church. In fact he was quite a cynic when it came to speaking about the churches of our city. "They're all playing games! None of them are serious about the real work of prayer, intercession and evangelism!" he would often say to whomever would listen to him.

One Sunday, Roger came to our Sunday morning service. He didn't know much about the 'niceties' of church meetings but radiated warmth in his brand new relationship with the Lord. "Jim led me to Christ last night," he told me, "and insisted that I attend this church to get disciplined!" I explained the difference between being disciplined and being disciplined.

When I next saw Jim, I commented on Roger, adding, with a grin, that it seemed that Jim was now in the business of producing illegitimate children, fathering them on the street, but expecting others to bring them up! This obviously got beneath Jim's skin, for the next Sunday he was in our church service. He was there for the next five weeks until, one day we met for lunch.

"What's on your heart these days?" I asked.

"Same as always - prayer and intercession" he replied.

"What do you think about our church's prayer life?" "Not much! No one there seems interested in prevailing prayer!" "Oh" I said, "I know a man in our church who has a real burden for prayer. He's almost two meters tall, has blond hair, is ....." Jim scratched his head as I continued the description, trying to think who this man might be, until I added that he had a small business as a commercial artist. "But that's me!" he said, looking at me as though I was losing my sanity.

"That's right!" I exclaimed. "So it is! Tell me Jim, why is it that God has given you this burden but you want me to carry it? I have my own burden to bear in the work of the

Lord, and I need you to be carrying your burden of prayer for me, so that I can more effectively carry my burden.”

“What should I do, then?” asked Jim.

“You should be telling me, not me telling you. You’re the one with the burden, and if that burden is truly from the Lord, He is the one to tell us how you are to carry it!”

“People need to be taught how to pray.”

“So, when are you going to do it?”

“What? me?”

“Yes, you! You’re the one with the burden! When are you going to start teaching the people to pray?”

“Next week?”

“OK!”

The following week Jim started a class, made up of a nucleus of my congregation and some students from the local University, who had heard of the teachings being advertised on campus. After the teaching, people began to pray and intercede in earnest, according to the ‘pattern’ that Jim had introduced to them. We were coming into an intimacy with the Lord and hearing the Spirit’s voice, leading us into prayer for the things upon the Lord’s heart. Within a year, the congregation had doubled, the elders had appointed an assistant pastor, a brand new building had been completed to seat nearly three hundred people and was almost completely paid for! My denomination leaders think I did a great job at that church, which had had a history of small numbers in attendance for several years, but I know what happened - and now you do. All I had done was release an eagle to fly!

The Lord had put His burden on Jim because He wanted to use him for the building up of His people. When he was released into ministry, God anointed the work.

### ***Your Burden***

What is heaviest upon your heart? Only you can tell the answer to that question though others may enable you to clearly define it. If you do not have a burden relating to the work of the Kingdom, please pray for the Lord to give you one and to make it known to you. When I asked the Lord for my burden for youth, I did not have the understanding that I do now concerning His burden being ‘light’. My prayer included the statement that I did not ask to be happy carrying the burden but only to know that, when my journey on earth is over, I will hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” I did not find a continuous happiness - in fact there were many unhappy experiences - but I certainly did find joy and fulfillment in that burden.

As I look at the ministry of Jesus it is evident that His burden is *relational* - it is for people. He said He had been anointed to preach to the poor, release the captives, give sight to the blind, set free the downtrodden and preach reconciliation or God’s favour upon the people.<sup>3</sup> Since those days, of course, we have developed the church to a place where we have beautiful buildings to maintain and so many well organised programs that it is easy for people to become less important than these things. Sadly, many of our ministries are so task-oriented that people are often considered expendable and many carry deep wounds from their experiences.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 4:18

Far be it from me to suggest that you should not have the burden to maintain a beautiful sanctuary, but remember that its purpose must always be to bring men and women into a deeper relationship with the Lord.

Here is a list of some burdens, one of which the Lord might place upon you.

**Within the congregation:** Bible teaching; children; church building; cleaning; dance; diaconate; eldership; evangelism; finances; flowers; marrieds; missions; music; new believers; outreach; praise & worship; prayer & intercession; seniors; singles; small group; Sunday school; unity; ushering; youth; ....

**In Society:** ; Victims of abortion; local businesses; coffee shop; environment; your family; provincial or federal government; minorities; prostitution; local schools; sports; street people; soup kitchens; women's rights; the workplace; ....  
.... add your own.