

the
Burden
Bearer



who's carrying your load?

PAUL W.
CHAPPELL

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DEDICATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ANYONE WHO HAS undertaken the process of writing a book knows that it can be a burden on multiple levels, especially a heartfelt burden to communicate truth. The Lord has recently brought me through a season of learning to cast my cares on Him. As He was teaching me to rely on His strength, I felt compelled to share it in book form. Some of these pages were handwritten in the wee hours of the morning—with you in mind.

I'm grateful to my wife, Terrie, who has encouraged and prayed for me as I've learned and relearned to let Christ bear my load. Terrie, your love and loyalty is beyond what I deserve. I'm thankful that we have the privilege of serving the Lord together.

I'd like to thank my writing assistant, Monica Bass, for implementing the allegory and seeing the manuscript to completion. I also thank Dr. John Goetsch for his work in reviewing and encouraging the development of the allegorical portions of this book.

Finally, I'd like to thank my staff and our church family. Thank you, staff, for helping to bear my burden and the burden of ministry. It is a joy to serve in the yoke with you. Thank you, Lancaster Baptist Church, for cultivating a heart for the Lord and for sharing the burden of the Burden Bearer—a care for souls. It is a privilege to be your pastor.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

DO YOU KNOW the Burden Bearer?

I met Him April 5, 1972—the best day of my life. He took my load of sin, and He became my closest friend.

Strange as it may seem, however, I still find myself burdened. Perhaps you do too.

How is it that we who personally know the One who invites us to cast our cares upon Him still stagger on bearing our own loads?

How is it that we who have chosen Christ's easy yoke persist in carrying our lopsided weights on our shoulders rather than hitching them to our shared yoke with Christ?

How is it that we who have dedicated ourselves to the service of *the* Burden Bearer so often find ourselves feeling heavy, burdened, weighted, and exhausted?

And one more question: If we learn to cast our cares on His shoulders, do we release them from our own?

These are questions that the Lord has been answering in my mind and heart over the past couple of years, and I'd like to share with you what He is teaching me.

Some things are best learned by a story, and so in these pages we meet Carrier—the main character in our burden-bearing allegory. I'm hopeful that the allegorical element of this book will bring a fresh perspective to truths that we sometimes struggle to apply. At the beginning of each chapter, we'll spend a brief time with Carrier and then move to scriptural applications for our lives.

Ultimately, I pray that through these pages we will discover the strength of the Burden Bearer and learn to cast ourselves into His everlasting arms.

P R E F A C E

NOT LONG AGO and not far away, Mr. and Mrs. Thinkstrong gave birth to their second son. “He’s so small,” his father declared. “His cry is so weak,” his mother lamented. “He’s scrawny,” the nurse scoffed as she left the room.

Gratified to be alone with his wife, Mr. Thinkstrong looked long and hard into her eyes. “How could this happen? It was so different with his brother. Brawn came into the world ready to take it on. He was born big and strong, and his bellowing cry echoed down the hospital hallways. All the nurses admired him the moment they laid eyes on him.”

The Thinkstrongs were born and reared in the village of Lifters. In Lifters, the strongest always won and the smartest always prevailed. If a man didn’t pull himself up by his own bootstraps,

he didn't get up. There was no coddling in the village of Lifters. The weak were silently (and often not so silently) scorned.

Mr. and Mrs. Thinkstrong's dilemma was obvious. They had brought a weakling into this world of vitality. What were they to do? Was their fate to raise a son who would be the brunt of jokes and the object of every villager's scorn his entire life?

"I know what we'll do," Mrs. Thinkstrong said with sudden inspiration. "As you know, every Lifter is expected to live up to his or her name. We'll give our new son a name to live up to—a name of strength and courage." She looked fondly—and now even hopefully—at the little one nestled in her arms. "We'll call him *Carrier*."

"*Carrier*?"

"Yes—*Carrier*. We will teach him to ponder the meaning of his name and to live a life fitting of his name. We will teach him to carry his own load through life. He'll carry his own load physically, and he will carry his own load emotionally. He will learn to rely on himself. He will strengthen himself every day to grow worthy of his name. I believe it's our only hope—*his* only hope."

"*Carrier* it is," said Mr. Thinkstrong. And so, *Carrier* it was.

Carrier had plenty of assistance in learning to live up to his name. When as a toddler he fell, his father spoke gruffly, "Get up, *Carrier*—men don't cry." When he would ask his big brother, Brawn, for help with a project, Brawn would coolly reply, "No, *Carrier*—Lifters always do it themselves." When he missed a catch or fell behind in a race, his coach would admonish, "Hey, *Carrier*, show us what you're made of—you'll never make it if you don't try harder. Now, get going!" When *Carrier* received a C on his report

card, his mother corrected, “This is not a grade befitting of a boy named *Carrier*. Try harder, Carrier—try harder.” Or at least, these were the words Carrier heard.

Carrier’s family wasn’t harsh; they also spoke words of encouragement to him. But they did want Carrier to succeed, and they knew that his only hope was strength. In fact, to really understand a Lifter, you have to know that *all* of them had the words *try harder, try harder* running through their minds like a script. It was the unwritten motto of Lifters. Try harder.

On the day a Lifter took his first step, he received a Pack. “Start them early,” the villagers had always said as they strapped the Pack to their tiny tot’s back. A Lifter’s Pack became a badge of honor. Obviously, a full Pack meant he could carry a heavier load. Every Lifter wanted a full Pack. The really brave ones made sure they had *overflowing* Packs, and the really vain ones imitated the really brave ones. For the most part, everyone had Packs that were heavier than they should have been carrying.

And that is why they needed the Burden Bearer.

Strange thing, however, about the Lifters who knew the Burden Bearer: some of them went right on carrying their loads by themselves—as if they didn’t really know the Burden Bearer at all. Of course, those who knew the Burden Bearer had already given Him their loads of Sin (see page 155), but many of them seemed to think that was all He wanted to carry for them—at least that’s what you would think if you saw them staggering through Lifters under their loads.

Carrier was one of these Lifters—one who knew the Burden Bearer but who still carried his own load. True to his mother’s

predictions and his father's dreams, Carrier had learned to live up to his name. And he courageously loaded his Pack full. And fuller. And fuller.

Not to shock you but Lifters actually is *your* hometown, and Carrier actually is *you!* Like Carrier, we are born into a world of burdens—a world where the strongest win, and the weak are crushed beneath their loads. We have family burdens, financial burdens, relational burdens, emotional burdens, health burdens, work burdens, responsibility burdens, and yes, even ministry burdens.

Some of us carry our burdens by natural capacity—some are simply stronger than others. Others of us do it by strategic management—learning how and when to conserve and expend energy. But even the strongest grow weary, and the smartest meet their limits. “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall” (Isaiah 40:30).

And so, we all need the Burden Bearer—Jesus Himself.

To all who will hear, our Burden Bearer calls, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Strange thing, however, about us “lifters” who know the Burden Bearer: we still have burdens. Stress. Fear. Anxiety. Perfectionism. And more. And stranger still, we often go right on carrying our loads all by ourselves—even though we know *the* Burden Bearer.

Carrier's story—which is not so unlike our own—is meant to remind us that there is a better way, that Jesus invites us to cast *all* of our burdens upon Him.

Who's carrying your load?

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.—ISAIAH 40:31

P A R T O N E

Lifters and Their Burdens

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.—PSALM 55:22

God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.—1 PETER 5:5-7

CHAPTER ONE

Tipping Points

CARRIER PAUSED TO shift the load in his Pack. Actually, as long as Carrier could remember, he had been shifting loads. It was a key strategy he had learned as a weak youngster. And it seldom failed him now.

Burdens readjusted, Carrier continued walking; and as he walked, he reflected on how thankful he was to know the Burden Bearer. In fact, Carrier had chosen some years ago to serve the Burden Bearer, and some of the loads in his Pack had actually come *from* the Burden Bearer. Of course, Carrier still had some of his own loads as well—the kind of loads common to all Lifters—Mortgage, Job, Difficult Boss, etc. And, like other Lifters, he had some invisible loads as well—Tension, Worry, Fear, and Grief.

But lately, Carrier had begun to notice a frightening difficulty. No matter how much he shifted the weights in his Pack, he was becoming less able to carry it. Just that morning, as he had been getting ready for work, he noticed in the mirror that his shoulders were stooped, his energy was short, and his perspective was heavy.

What's wrong with me? Carrier questioned himself as he trudged to work. *I'm supposed to be growing stronger, not weaker.*

Carrier thought about each of the loads in his Pack. He thought about the loads he was carrying for the Burden Bearer. He shifted them around in his mind. But no matter how he looked at them or repositioned them, he couldn't seem to make even one of them lighter.

So he ignored the strain and trudged forward.

Just ahead, Carrier saw his good friend Bestrong, and he hurried to catch up.

Always fresh and energetic, Bestrong greeted Carrier with a slap on the back, or rather a slap on the Pack.

"How's it going, Carrier?"

If any other Lifter had asked this question, Carrier would have forced a smile (hoping it appeared more genuine than it was) and said "great" with more enthusiasm than he felt. But Bestrong had been his closest friend for years. They had met at Recharge—a place where all the Lifters who knew the Burden Bearer met weekly.

"Actually," Carrier began, "I don't know what to do." And he sat down on a sidewalk bench in exhaustion.

Bestrong sat down next to Carrier, his energy softening into sympathy. "What's wrong?"

“I just can’t do it all,” Carrier said bluntly. And he hung his head in shame. That was a tough confession for a Lifter.

“That’s right,” Bestrong said encouragingly.

Carrier looked up in surprise. Maybe Bestrong hadn’t heard him correctly. He rephrased his confession with different words. “My load is too heavy. I can’t go on like this much longer.”

“No, you really can’t,” Bestrong agreed.

Carrier was surprised—and a bit irritated—at Bestrong’s calm responses. How could he so easily say, “No, you can’t do it all”?

The two sat in silence for a few minutes until Bestrong spoke. “I’m really glad to hear you finally say it, Carrier.”

Carrier was getting frustrated. “Glad?!”

“Yep. I know it’s tough to say, but it’s the first step to getting help.”

“Yeah, really? Like from who?”

“The Burden Bearer.”

Carrier snorted. “You don’t understand, Bestrong. Half of my load of Stress relates to what I do for the Burden Bearer!”

“The source of your Stress is inconsequential. Wherever your Stress comes from or whatever it’s made of, the Burden Bearer is really good at bearing it.”

“Easy for you to say, Bestrong. You’re always equal to the load in front of you—that’s why we call you Bestrong!”

“Really? What if I told you that Bestrong was just the beginning of my name?”

Carrier looked at his friend with curiosity.

“It’s really long, but I’ve shortened it for my friends. Altogether it is BeStrongInTheLordAndInThePowerOfHisMight.”

Carrier laughed, and the relief felt good.

“Seriously,” Bestrong continued, “I learned a long time ago—about the time that I was crushed under my load of stress—that I don’t have the strength to be strong on my own. I can only do it in the might of the Burden Bearer.” He paused and then added, “I had what you might call a tipping point.”

I began studying lever and fulcrum physics when I was four. And I didn’t even use a textbook. (Actually, I couldn’t read yet.) My education came via the playground.

It didn’t take me long to learn that if I was at the bottom of the teeter-totter, and my younger, lighter sister was at the top, I could give her a fast crash landing by simply getting off my seat. I may not have fine-tuned the exact tipping point, but I knew it was there, and before I even knew what it was called, I could leverage it to my advantage.

Our lives are a little bit like that playground teeter-totter, in that we have tipping points. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally—we reach a point when our equilibrium is catapulted off balance and we find ourselves in a free fall.

The culprit?

Stress.

What’s tipping your balance?

Stress adds spice to life. Think about it. A life with no stress would be void of victory or conquest. It would be empty of suspense and challenge. We need stress—it’s a good thing.

But as helpful as some stress may be, we do have a tipping point.

Too much stress is like being on the heavy side of the teeter-totter. You can't get off the ground no matter how hard you try. Except perhaps for a brief jump that expends all of your energy.

Dr. Richard Swenson calls too much stress *overload*. In his book *Margin*, he cites areas of overload that burden our lives.¹ Individually, we may be able to manage any one of them. But collectively? We don't have enough time, energy, or emotional strength to continually juggle them all.

- Activity Overload
- Change Overload
- Choice Overload
- Commitment Overload
- Debt Overload
- Decision Overload
- Expectation Overload
- Fatigue Overload
- Hurry Overload
- Information Overload
- Media Overload
- Noise Overload
- People Overload
- Possession Overload
- Technology Overload
- Traffic Overload
- Work Overload

Stress has become an epidemic. The American Stress Institute reports that stress is responsible for 250 million lost workdays per year.² Additionally, 75–90 percent of all doctor visits are for stress-related complaints.³ It is estimated that American companies spend at least \$300 billion annually due to stress-related accidents, absenteeism, and attrition as a result of workplace stress.⁴ According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 23 million Americans suffer from some form of anxiety disorder.⁵

While everyone lives with some level of stress, there can be no doubt that we live in a day when stressors have reached debilitating levels in many Christians' lives. Among full schedules, heavy demands, and never-ending urgencies, we easily find ourselves in a chronic state of depletion with no reserve.

We may be able to handle some stress on our own, but we do have a tipping point. Once you've passed yours, the burden of stress becomes unsustainable.

Bring it on

Many of the stressors you and I experience are unique to our period in history. Or at least the sheer volume and speed at which they pile on is unique to our unrestrained age of progress.

But stress itself is not new. Neither is overload. It's a common burden Christians of all ages have carried in their Packs.

No doubt Elijah had reached his tipping point when he collapsed under the juniper tree and requested death (1 Kings 19:4). He had just confronted King Ahab about his sin, conducted a

spiritual showdown of massive proportions, personally executed 450 false prophets, and had been chased out of town with a price on his head. Talk about stress!

Martha knew something of stress. In Luke 10:40 we find her frustrated under the load of her service. “But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.” In today’s terms, we might say that Martha was “stressing out.” The frazzling details of her day had exhausted her patience and pushed her near her tipping point.

The major stressors that enter our lives are often not of our own choosing. They may be laid on our shoulders through decisions or events outside our control. Sometimes they pile so high that we really don’t believe there is an answer or a way to escape the load.

When these trying circumstances enter our lives, we must accept God’s assignment and believe that He has a sovereign plan. That’s not an easy task, but questioning God or being angry at Him does not help us bear the burden of stress. It weakens us and moves us nearer to the tipping point.

The greatest stress in my life, to this point, has been watching my oldest son, Larry, endure two surgeries and intense chemotherapy during his battle with cancer. While God has been gracious and Larry’s recent tests have revealed good results, even today the thought of Larry’s pain or his upcoming tests produce an increased stress level. My heart begins to race, my blood pressure rises, and a deep tension headache sometimes sets in.

In fact, there was a day when an accumulation of stressors pushed me to a tipping point of physical collapse. With my blood

pressure at 220/115, I realized that I needed to learn a better way to handle the burden of stress.

I trusted God, but I had reached my tipping point.

Room to tip

Tipping points aren't all bad. They can be used of the Holy Spirit to bring positive change into our lives.

One of the most significant principles I learned at my tipping point was the principle of margin. To again quote Dr. Swenson, “Margin is the space between our load and our limits. It is the amount allowed beyond that which is needed. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. Margin is the gap between rest and exhaustion, the space between breathing freely and suffocating.”⁶

When you are living with no margin and are always in “overload mode,” a major stressful event can become a tipping point. Living with margin provides room to tip before you reach the tipping point.

Consider Elijah. When he collapsed under the juniper tree, he was absolutely wrung out—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. What if he had held his emotions in check and planned some time for personal rest and refreshment before conceding failure? As it was, the Lord intervened and restored the margin Elijah had lost. God fed him and gave him forty days to regain his equilibrium.

Consider Martha. She missed the spiritual margin that comes through worship, and as a result, her service became overly

cumbersome. Had she followed Mary's example and spent time at Jesus' feet, she would have had a clearer perspective of her to-do list.

Consider yourself. Have you allowed margin to replenish your batteries so you are not chronically running on reserve power?

Under the cape

Before we can adequately understand the solution to overload, we need to first answer the question, "Why are we in overload anyway?" Why have we, like Carrier in the parable, determined that high levels of stress are normal?

Stress is obviously related to the fact that we are over-extended in some area—most commonly our schedules and commitments. But what is the root issue of this complex? Why do we don the Superman (or Superwoman) cape in the first place?

There could be many answers to that question, some of which we'll look at in chapter 4. But I speak for myself and, I have discovered, for a host of other Christians sincerely wanting to do more for Jesus. Long before the overloaded schedule, the migraine headaches, or the fatigue, there was a willingness to "surrender all" to Jesus.

But then we began to lose our equilibrium.

Somewhere in the process of our busy schedules, we forgot the surrender-all-to-Jesus mindset and we developed a do-it-all-for-Jesus philosophy. One problem. Jesus never created—nor expects—us to do it all. In fact, He will never equip us to do it all.

I have taught church leadership across America and around the world for two decades. I believe in and practice the principles I have taught:

- People do what people see; leaders must set the example.
- People only respect what we inspect; leaders must manage the process.
- We must regulate what we delegate; leaders are responsible to follow through.

The list goes on. As you can see from these points, I believe in being fully engaged in causative leadership. I believe in follow through, and I believe the Christian's life should reflect order.

Yet, as I enter the second half of my life, the Lord is also teaching me that I don't have to fix every problem.

I don't have to do God's job.

I can take off the Superman cape.

To be sure, I have always known and preached that the church is the Lord's. And I still work with intensity and passion as a pastor. I would never encourage a spiritual leader to become a slacker in the work of God. But there is a difference between being lazy and giving the burden of stress to the Lord.

Your stress burdens may look different from mine. They may be primarily attached to your job, your relationships, your schedule, your goals, your finances, your ministries, or a host of other variables. They are likely a combination of several burdens. But whatever the stress burdens in your Pack look like, I challenge you to build margin into your life. Outside of uncontrollable emergencies (which come to everyone and are part of the reason

that we *need* margin), be unwilling to carry more stress than fits in your Pack when you are not wearing your Superman cape. The Burden Bearer did not design your body or your mind to carry an unrestrained burden of stress.

We do not need good Christians falling out of the race because of over-extension and hyper-stress. In America alone, stress-related illness costs billions of dollars each year to treat, and consecrated Christians are no exception to the symptoms and treatments of stress-related maladies.

Removing the cape and creating space to breathe is a means by which we acknowledge to the Lord that we are not able to bear the burden of stress without Him.

The overcomer's secret

One of the truths the Lord used in my life to lift the load of stress from my shoulders is summed up in this statement: A sacrificial life will always be unfinished. (Yes, this means that I won't finish everything today.)

There is a fine line between diligence and drivenness. At least on the surface. Underneath, there is a chasm. Driven Christians carry the stress of trying to do God's work for Him. Diligent Christians fully give themselves to the Lord and trust Him to do His work through them.

Ultimately, if the Lord doesn't build the house (or the Sunday school class, or the church, or the family, or the business, or the relationship, or _____), we are laboring in vain anyway

(Psalm 127:1). We release the burden of stress when we release the responsibilities for the outcome to the Lord.

You don't have to wait for a stress-induced tipping point. You don't have to run until your legs are crippled with stress fractures. You don't have to add more stress burdens to your Pack until your shoulders are permanently stooped.

Yes, in this world there is unavoidable tribulation. But the Lord has already overcome this world and bids us to follow His lead, to ride in His wake, and to be an overcomer.

You can drop the cape.

You are an overcomer through Christ.

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1. Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (NavPress, 2004), 61–63.
 2. The American Institute of Stress, “Workplace Stress” (accessed October 24, 2012), <http://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/>.
 3. Joseph Goldberg, “The Effects of Stress on Your Body” (July 23, 2012), <http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/effects-of-stress-on-your-body>.
 4. The American Institute of Stress, “Workplace Stress” (accessed October 24, 2012), <http://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/>.
 5. Archibald Hart, *The Anxiety Cure* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001), 7.
 6. Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (NavPress, 2004), 69.

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