Parents – bearers of burdens for their children

Henning Panthel · Galatians 6:2 · February 12, 2026



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> 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfil the law of the Christ.

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“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). When we read this Bible verse, we quickly think of charity and helpfulness. These are certainly Christian virtues, but is that really all there is to it? Let's take a closer look at this exhortation and ask ourselves specifically how we as parents can implement it with our children (especially with teenagers and young adults).

Paul, the writer of the letter, is concerned about the Galatians. They had believed false teachers, and some thought that they had to fulfill the ordinances of the Old Testament (especially circumcision) in order to be justified before God. As a result, they had lost sight of the fact that only grace and faith in the work of Calvary saves. In chapter 5, Paul writes about the workings of the old nature, which we still have within

us after our conversion. It produces only evil works (see vv. 19-21). However, the new life in the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us is different: when He can work in us, (good) fruit is produced (see vv. 22-23). The first verse of chapter 6 shows that believers can still sin. They stumble and fall (i.e., they “are hastened by a misstep”), but this is not the normal state of affairs, but an exception. Then, spiritually mature believers should correct them. The second verse calls us to another service to one another: “Bear one another's burdens.”

What is meant by “burdens”?

The word ‘burdens’ appears twice in this chapter. In verse 5 (“for each one shall bear his own burden”), the Greek word “phortion” is used. The word means an appropriate load and was also used for cargo (e.g., ship cargo). The word “burdens” in our verse (Greek “baros”) refers to a load that is (too) heavy or oppressive. This does not refer to sins, because no one can bear them for another. It refers to burdens that we “carry around” with us. For the Galatians, these were, for example, the burdens that arose from their legalistic attitude. When it comes to the burdens our children face, they can be many. They can be external difficulties, such as:

- Accidents, illness, unemployment, and family hardships
- School and career challenges
- Disappointments
- Social and political unrest
- Problems in the local church

Or they can be internal hardships, such as:

- Unresolved issues, difficult decisions
- Dissatisfaction with oneself, insecurity
- fears, doubts about faith

The list is not exhaustive; there is a wide range of possible burdens for young people. Especially when they lack experience of faith, these burdens can be too heavy to bear and even become stumbling blocks that lead to missteps. Unfortunately, as parents, we sometimes notice our children's burdens too late (or not at all), or we

underestimate them.

What helps us to recognize burdens?

We live in a very complex world, especially for young people, where relationships are becoming increasingly superficial and good interpersonal communication is disappearing. This development does not stop at our children or us. But perhaps the following points can help us:

- **Time for each other:** We can only recognize (and share) our children's burdens if we spend time with them. But we parents often lack this. Work, home, leisure, and similar activities can take up so much of our time that our family life is limited to special occasions. Yet time is one of the most valuable gifts we can give our children, both as a family and individually with each child.
- **Love for one another:** We are allowed to love our children because they are a gift from God. This means that we should not only seek their material well-being, but also their spiritual and emotional well-being. Loving them also means being there for them and accepting them as they are, with all their strengths and weaknesses. But this love does not come automatically.

- As parents, we want to pray that we truly love our children and seek opportunities to put this into practice. And we want to behave in ways that make it easy for our children to feel and reciprocate this love.
- Openness with each other: Openness is a prerequisite for recognizing the burdens our children carry. It is not easy to live by—especially for us fathers. Sometimes we are afraid of being confronted with problems for which we have no solution (men tend to think in a very solution-oriented way). Or we fear that our openness will be interpreted as “control” or that it will hurt our children.

It is not easy for children to talk about their burdens either. Perhaps they are embarrassed, or afraid that we, as parents, might interpret this as a sign of weakness. But if we are open with appropriate sensitivity and clarity, our children will usually accept this gratefully.

What does “carry” mean?

The word “bastázo,” translated here as “carry,” originally means to lift or pick something up. Perhaps the following illustration will help: During a challenging mountain hike with a youth group, one of the young people reaches his limits and wants to give up. Then suddenly others are there, picking up his backpack and carrying it on their shoulders. This makes it easier for him to continue.

This image shows how we can help our children to bear their hardships, worries, and difficulties. To do this, we must actively approach them and ask about their well-being, including their spiritual well-being (see 3 John 2). It is important that we then listen patiently. Sometimes it is appropriate to advise them (this requires a great deal of spiritual wisdom!), sometimes we also have to admonish them. Sometimes we “only” have to do what Paul writes about in Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

This is perhaps the most difficult thing for us as parents. We can and should pray with them and encourage them. It often helps to share our experiences (of faith) with them or to share with them the mistakes we ourselves made as young people.

But bearing one another's burdens also means praying together as parents for our children. Not only when they are in danger of collapsing under the weight of their burdens, but of course, we should pray intensely then. But we want to pray daily and persistently beforehand that the Lord will protect them from such burdens.

Who can bear?

In general, the call to bear one another's burdens applies to all believers and should benefit every believer. When it comes to our children, however, we as parents have a special responsibility. Even if others can support us in this (e.g., through youth work), it is a task that we cannot simply delegate.

What are the prerequisites for bearing the burdens of children? When it comes to correcting a misstep (see v. 1), those who are firm in their faith and guided by the Holy Spirit (“you who are spiritual”) are called upon.

Of course, this is also an important basis for bearing burdens, but it is not explicitly required here. As parents, we strive for a high degree of spiritual discernment and steadfastness in our faith. But if we set the “bar” too high for ourselves here, it can hinder us from taking on the burden of carrying. But then we can fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus, who can carry all burdens perfectly and is also our perfect example in this.

The example of bearing burdens

As parents, bearing burdens can push us to our limits. We often ask ourselves how we can manage this. The second part of the verse, therefore, directs our attention to the attitude with which we should bear the burdens of others: “... and thus fulfill the law of Christ.”

This “law” is the law of love[1], which was perfectly lived out in the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth. For Him, bearing burdens was a law (in the sense of a ‘guideline’). That is why He called out: “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He had an eye and a heart for the needs of others: He saw the helpless crowd and was moved inwardly for them (see Mark 6:34). He took time for others: He let the disciples rest with Him after their strenuous service and listened to them (see Mark 6:30-31). He had a heart full of love and compassion: when He heard the news of Lazarus' illness, we read that He loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. When Lazarus died, He wept (see John 11).

Of course, He performed the service of bearing burdens in an absolutely perfect way, in a way that we can never do. But He left us an example from which we can learn and imitate; He showed us an attitude we can use as a guide. And we (as burdened parents and children) can always take refuge in prayer directly with Him who said, “Come to me” (emphasis added).

The source of strength for bearing burdens

Any father whose children are already grown up who thinks about this topic will realize how necessary this task is. But also what challenges this call entails, how little it has been fulfilled, and how often we have failed in this regard. But thanks be to God: His inexhaustible grace is available to us. When we, as fathers or mothers, desire to

help our children carry their burdens and tell Him this in prayer, we can be sure He will give us the wisdom and strength to do so.

> *When God gives us burdens to bear, He does not leave us alone with them. He carries us along with our burdens. King David knew this, too, which is why he said:*
>
> **“Praise the Lord! Day after day**
>
> **He carries our burdens; God is our salvation.”**
>
> Psalm 68:20

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