



# Christian Questions

Think about the Bible like you never have before

Dear Joe,

Thank you for writing and asking, "So it seems recently that various people have been coming to me with their burdens and problems telling me about pains and difficulties. My question is why do I feel that I absorb some of their sorrow and why does it wear on me so much?"

Helping to bear the burden (something that makes one weaker) of another can affect us physically and emotionally. It sounds like you have great compassion and sympathy for others. People seem to feel comfortable and safe sharing their difficulties with you. Sometimes people need a caring listener who acknowledges their challenges and feels for them. This is a wonderful way to serve others by allowing them a moment to share a burden. It can really help someone to bear a trial. Proverbs 11:25 (ESV) states, "Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered." 2 Corinthians 9:7 (World English Bible) reads, "Let each man give according as he has determined in his heart; not grudgingly, or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver."

We are encouraged to bear one another's burdens, fulfilling the law of Christ (see Galatians 6:2). Doing so may physically and mentally drain us at times. In bearing the burdens of others we suggest it may help you to think of and embark on that help as though you are *walking together* with a friend in need, listening, thus helping to ease *some* of the heaviness of the burden by *acknowledging* it. Realize that you will not often be able to solve the friend's problem. That is not your responsibility in most cases. You may aid them in coping better and providing the strength to press on just by providing your earnest attention and sincerely caring attitude. At times you may be able to respectfully suggest a bit of advice if they would like, or else offer a cheerful way to look at the bright side, or whatever seems appropriate. You may have some experience on the matter at hand, or you might look up or recall a helpful scripture to encourage them. Proverbs 15:23 and Proverbs 25:11 tell us how wonderful a word spoken at the right time can be. Often though, we can only listen and offer a smile and our sympathy. Just being there often helps. If we cannot be there in person, we might mail (snail mail) a note or electronic message.

We read in Luke 8:43-46 how, as a perfect, man Jesus healed a woman with a 12-year health issue and strength went out of him. He willingly suffered to help others. That is a most beautiful thing. Although we are not perfect, we too may feel exhausted after sharing in the pain of others if we really care about helping them. Our minds and bodies are so designed that mental stress can be manifested in physical discomfort. It makes sense that you feel you absorb some of the sorrow of those you give attention to and that it wears you out. The Bible does tell us to treat others as we want to be treated. However, *everything needs to be balanced*.

Philippians 4:5 tells us to be moderate (reasonable, not excessive). This is sometimes easier said than done. Even Jesus needed to take care of his needs for rest, food, and especially speaking with his heavenly Father. He needed to be refreshed. Mark 6:31 (NIV) reads, "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" Luke 5:16 (NASB) says, "But Jesus...would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." We read of Jesus praying to God all night in Luke 6:12. He never overlooked his spiritual needs. If we love God with all our hearts (Luke 10:27) nurturing our connection to Him through Jesus, all other things fall into their proper place eventually. We are told to *first* seek *His kingdom* (Matthew 6:33). When our connection to God is firm through prayer and Bible study, we have more of the peace of God which transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and can more readily understand how He wants us to divide our time between daily responsibilities and serving others so we are not continually feeling burned out. We too understand and deal with this challenge and it is often a struggle to balance life properly.



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In order to provide assistance to others by interacting with them or just being a good example to them, we need to properly attend to our own needs and responsibilities such as rest, food, work, family care, etc. We also must make time for our own spiritual refreshment through Bible study and prayer. We may need to kindly set boundaries for appropriate times and places to support our friends if possible. For example, sometimes one friend may come to rely heavily on our time and comfort and this may seriously infringe on other responsibilities. In this case, we could caringly and enthusiastically let them know we wish we could have a conversation at that time, but it would be better for us better to perhaps text, email, talk on the phone, or meet at a specified time. We also need to try not to enable someone by completely fixing a problem which they would be better served by fixing themselves, even if with a little assistance. Helping someone stand with support if needed and when they are able is important, even though there may be times someone actually needs to be carried. It relates to the old adage, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." We can offer support with our kindness, scriptural helps, encouragement, suggestions when wanted; we shouldn't necessarily do all of the work required to solve the whole problem. This can help someone to help themselves and it also helps us not to attempt to bear more burdens than we are able to in the midst of our daily responsibilities. God does not give us the spirit of fear, but of love and self-control (see 2 Timothy 1:7).

In summary, John 15:13 teaches us that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives in service to our friends. Doing so in a *reasonable* way to the best of our ability can help us *balance* our own lives better so we don't become perpetually exhausted and thus unable to care properly for ourselves, which would make it difficult for us to help anyone else. When we cannot be present to support a friend, we can pray for God's will to be done in their long term best interest. When together, we can pray with them. Revelation 21:4 (NIV) comforts us with the promise for all mankind, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Similarly, Isaiah 51:11 (ERV) assures us, "...the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Until that glorious day for which we pray God's will to be done *both* on earth and in heaven (Matthew 6:10), we have the privilege of helping our brothers and sisters in this world as we have opportunity (see Galatians 6:10), while remembering to take care of ourselves. Loving our neighbor as ourselves (see Mark 12:31) assumes we love and take care of ourselves.

Some Christian friends of ours wear t-shirts that say, "God's got this." That phrase helps us remember that although we want to do as much as we can for others, we can never do it all. We can leave our burdens with the Lord.

We appreciate your thoughtful question and we hope we have answered it and pointed you to some of the many scriptures relating to this subject. Feel free to write us again. Please see our website, [ChristianQuestions.com](http://ChristianQuestions.com), for scriptural advice on a wide variety of topics, as well as archived programs with a scriptural perspective. You may also sign up for our newsletter to receive the weekly written transcript, CQ Rewind. The service is free without obligation.

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