



Weight Bearing

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. - Romans 15:1

The immediate context of Romans 15:1 is a discussion concerning a mature Christian's attitude towards a Christian with a "weak" conscience, but the principle has a multitude of applications. Those who are strong should help carry the burdens of those who are weak. Reprinted from God's Special People Magazine, October 1989.

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Many, if not most persons with disabilities would not want to refer to themselves as weak. That is okay. However, I have no doubt that my daughter is definately "weak." Born with severe cerebral palsy, at the age of seven she cannot talk, walk, or sit up unaided. She has to be fed, bathed, diapered, and requires total care. Stacie will probably never make headlines in any success-orientated publication. No one has ever mentioned her being in the Special Olympics. We all know she wouldn't have any idea what it was about. Simply put, she is weak. And "we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."

Really, it wasn't my motive to write about my daughter or myself, but rather about other parents who walk a similar path, about disabled persons who know they are "weak," about those who are so weak that they can't even tell us. I will refer to situations such as these as "special families."

What can fellow Christians do to help such special families?



I.) HELP CARRY EMOTIONAL WEIGHT.

The emotional strain that some special families have is sometimes hidden and unmentioned. It is not dishonesty, but often a sincere desire not to be a chronic complainer. Sometimes special families do not even realize the emotional stress they are under. Some special families, for a variety of reasons, do not have any abnormal emotional stress.

Suppose a parent has an autistic child who is very hard to control, especially in more quiet settings such as church. This almost always causes emotional upset, for the parent wants to be under the sound of the Word of God, But the nursery workers don't know how to handle the child, and the parent gets little out of the services sitting in the nursery every time. Emotions run at an all time high.

How can the strong help the weak in such circumstances? First, perhaps husband and wife can rotate the responsibility of caring for the child either in the nursery or at home. Mother should not always bear all the responsibility. Also, perhaps in some churches it might be possible to have a rotating respite care system, so that the parents don't always have to miss church.

This would take additional work, but the emotional weight would be distributed so that one person isn't bearing it all.

II.) HELP CARRY THE FINANCIAL WEIGHT.

I am very thankful that God has enabled us to pay off the medical bills we owed after Stacie was born, and when we discovered she had cerebral palsy. But many special families are under tremendous financial burdens. There is the need for special equipment, special diets, therapy, doctor bills, etc. The birth of a special child can sometimes place upon a family a need for much greater income, but employers rarely give raises in such events.

Those who have the financial ability to give when another family experiences disability should do so. *"But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him"* (1 John 3:17). There is usually a need to be met.

A word to the Christian special family. If you have such a need, and someone tries to help you financially, don't be too proud to accept aid. The verse mentioned above indicates that the "Love of God" is to be expressed by believers giving to others in need;

sometimes you find yourself the giver, and sometimes the receiver.

III.) HELP CARRY THE SPIRITUAL WEIGHT.

When a person is suddenly disabled, or a disabled child is born, there is a need for kind spiritual weight bearing. Sometimes that need is expressed vocally, "Why did God let this happen to me?" Other times there is secret frustration, guilt, or even anger towards God. Such special families need those who are strong in wisdom and faith to be there for them, not to criticize, but as circumstances allow, to lovingly share Biblical



guidance and insight.

Admit you don't have all the answers. Don't build up false hopes. Listen a lot. Really care. If non-Christian people are involved, make sure you keep the door open for witnessing about Christ. Pray.

My wife and I have found that because of our faith in the sovereign God, our daughter is not perceived by us as a burden but rather a

blessing. Because we love Him and because we love her, we usually don't think about the strain. Also, we thank God for the friends and relatives that have helped us in countless ways, emotionally, financially, as well as spiritually. They have been there for us. Now let's be there for one another.

Bear ye one anothers burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

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Stacie has been with the Lord since 1997. As we reflect back to those early years, we realize that it was the Lord who carried us through those years of uncertainty.

