

## **I will lay my burden down** (Matthew 18:21-35)

This weekend my daughter is on a Duke of Edinburgh practice expedition, walking across South Buckinghamshire following a map with a full rucksack on her back. You walk differently when you carry a heavy load – whether it be a rucksack or even bags of shopping. You lean forward and you look down, not up. Your posture alters.

It's a long time ago since I first read John Bunyan's classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, the story of Christian's journey to the celestial city and the adventures he has on the way are metaphors for life.

He starts with a backpack carrying a heavy load yet near the start of his journey, "just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back: and began to tumble ... Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest, by his sorrow, and life, by his death.'" Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the cross should ease me of his burden. He looked ... even till the springs that were in his head sent the water down his cheeks. [Angels] came to him, and saluted him, with 'Peace be to thee' ... 'Thy sins be forgiven.' Christian then carries on his journey running, leaping and singing.

The things that we've done wrong - our sin and guilt - are burdens we carry. They cause us to look down. Being forgiven lifts us and we stand taller. We look up and out, rather than down and inside ourselves. The change is dramatic and physical.

Jesus' conversation with Peter about forgiveness and the story that he tells, show how dramatic forgiveness can be. There was the servant about to be thrown into jail with his family because of a debt that could not be repaid. Yet the King forgives him the debt and the slave has the chance to walk tall, to make a new start and live life in a different way. Forgiveness from God gives us that.

The tragic thing is that the servant did not grasp the opportunity, and spots someone who owes him a small amount of money. The servant does not display that same grace and forgiveness which had been shown to him. And the upshot is that the king reinstates the debt the servant is owed.

Forgiveness from God is free. But it comes with a cost (if that doesn't sound stupid). The cost is a change in outlook, an altering of perspective. As we stand tall in mercy and grace and forgiveness, we are called to live according to God's kingdom - in love, mercy and forgiveness (or in the words of the prophet Micah to "Love mercy, do kindness and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).) This is the cost or the consequence of forgiveness.

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Jesus invites us to lay the burden of our sin down at the foot of his cross, to receive freedom, forgiveness and to walk with him.

This doesn't mean that life will be perfect. It will still have its struggles and difficulties. Things will still get us down ...

One of the things that people will be taught at the Duke of Edinburgh weekend is how to pack their rucksack. There's an art to it, which makes it easier to carry.

In life, we still have to carry our burdens. But with Jesus alongside us and supporting us, we are given the strength to carry and bear that load.

Jesus ends the passage says that forgiveness has consequences. It is not an event, but a lifestyle. Just like the Duke of Edinburgh expedition is a journey, not a single step.

We are challenged/invited/challenged not just to live as forgiven people, but to practice forgiveness every day.

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## **Prayer for the Week**

I am not worthy, yet you love me Lord,  
I do not deserve so much and yet I have it.  
I have many needs  
and before you I acknowledge them;  
fill my life with your presence  
so that I may stand tall in your love and mercy  
and that others too may come to know  
your healing balm. Amen.      *(adapted from Roots)*

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