

Empathetic Burden Bearing Defilement

John and Paula Sandford

Empathetic burden bearing defilement occurs when, in the process of identifying with others and bearing their burdens, our mind and/or heart translates others' problems as though they were our own. Burden bearing itself is not defilement; we simply feel what another feels as it is drawn through us to the cross. It becomes defilement when our mind and/or heart accepts the lie that what we are feeling or thinking is our own.

Some Examples

A woman for whom John would never feel sexual attraction came for counseling. John found himself thinking, "I want to peel this woman's clothes off. I want to get in bed with her!" Alarmed, he cried out to God (silently), "What is this?" God answered, and John asked the woman, "Since you came in here, have you been thinking lustful thoughts toward me?" She replied, "Yes, pastor, I have, and I'm sorry."

- As a counselor, John had identified with her and felt what she was feeling. Up to that point, it was simple burden bearing.
- It became defilement when John's mind translated it as his own thoughts.

A pediatrician testified: "I'm a well-trained competent doctor. But every once in a while a mother will come in with a sick child, and while ministering to him medically, I find myself thinking, 'I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what to do for this child!'"

- A good doctor must empathize, but this doctor's mind took as his own what the mother felt; thus, it became defilement.

A choir director admitted: "I'm a Juilliard graduate; I know music backwards and forwards. But sometimes I direct nonprofessional choirs, people who don't know how to read music. More than once I have found myself thinking, 'I don't know how to read this music; I can't keep time, I don't know what I'm doing!' It didn't make sense."

- She had felt the fears of the untrained choir members.
- She had empathetically thought their thoughts.
- It became defilement when her mind and heart believed they were her own feelings and thoughts.

Who has not experienced the following puzzle? You meet someone for the first time, and within five minutes you get an impulse to hit him/her in the face, or give an insult, or do some other strange hurtful thing? Sometime the person's looks, speech or manner remind you of someone you haven't forgiven, but often it's simply empathetic defilement. That person had a bitter root expectancy to be rejected and hurt. Defilement caused you to think you wanted to do something hurtful.

Why does this happen? We don't know. Burden bearing isn't always defilement. Sometimes it's easy to recognize that what we're feeling and thinking is only burden bearing, not ours at all. In

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E n r i c h m e n t

other instances, our minds and hearts become bemused. And it's not always matter of immaturity in the gifts; it happens occasionally to experienced, well-trained counselors. Occasionally the person triggers something undealt with in our memories, but more often it is empathetic burden bearing defilement. Defilement can happen as demons employ tactics to confuse and seduce, but it will also occur by our flesh, without demonic help. In short, it simply happens.

How can we discern if what we are experiencing is our own, or empathetic defilement?

Often, because it doesn't "fit." John knew he wasn't really interested in the woman. He felt no corresponding passions; he only found himself thinking strange thoughts. John is secure with Paula, tremendously moral, and has never ever given himself to another, or even wanted to. A moment's reflection enabled his discernment to function. In like manner, the doctor and the choir director knew their competence, so the feelings didn't "fit."

But suppose the counselee is "your type," someone who is sexually attractive to you. In this situation you may not be able to get clear discernment. We are fallible creatures entrusted with a task too big for us. It is important to acknowledge this in humility, and then to institute some simple safeguards:

- Never act hastily. Step back. Regain perspective. Time is your friend, haste your enemy. Talk with your spouse or close friend (without naming names or breaking confidence). Give the Holy Spirit time to let the dust of confusion settle and restore balance and perspective.
- Never act immorally—or in any way Jesus would not.
- Be in accord with your spouse; cease counseling if you are out of sorts with your spouse, knowing you're too vulnerable to be risked in the arena at the moment. Settle the problems at home, and then return to counsel. If you're unmarried, have friends who check and balance you.
- Don't be a "lone ranger." Counsel in an office with others, or make sure there is an authority over you.
- Don't take yourself and your work too seriously; save time for recreation; have fun, enjoy life; keep your Sabbath times inviolate; get enough sleep; get out into nature; if married, maintain a good, wholesomely fulfilling sexual life.
- Pray hygienic prayers regularly: "Lord, wash away from me whatever defilements I have picked up today."
- Ask the Lord for sharper perceptions and increase in the gift of discernment; learn from experience; build and maintain safe boundaries.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." So few know anything about empathetic defilement. We have seen many leaders fall because they believed what they thought and felt was their own, when it was only defilement at a time when they happened to be vulnerable and needy.

*"For wisdom is protection...
wisdom preserves the lives of it's possessors"*

Ecclesiastes 7:12

*Teach these things. Save some,
snatching them as if were from the fire.*

Jude 23



a prayer for burden bearers...

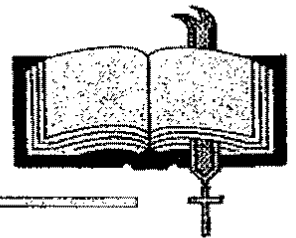
Lord, thank you that You equip us with Your gifts. They are plentiful and diverse, given out according to Your will. We know we need these gifts in order to serve you, and we need them to be operated **ONLY** by the power of your Holy Spirit—not by our flesh or our power.

In particular, I return to You my ability to see, hear, sense and know things about people. Lord, I want to see only what You want me to see, hear only what You choose me to hear, and sense and know only what Your Holy Spirit reveals. I ask You to slay in me any developed psychic abilities and cleanse me from any defilement that comes from using an unredeemed gift. I ask You to stand in front of me at all times so that as I relate to other people, their pain or torment will come to You first. Lord, I ask You to allow me to feel only enough to teach me how to pray intelligently and specifically.

Lord, I choose to lay all my gifts on the altar; my natural giftedness for bearing burdens I give to You, along with every other kind of gift You've given me. Let me die to them. I trust you will give it back refined and directed by the Holy Spirit. Let it be so, Lord, for I know it is Your will.

IMPORTANT: These sample prayers are not formulas; rather, they offer ideas and direction. Be led by the Holy Spirit, and use the substance of these prayers as a guide. Also, please acknowledge these prayers as sample narratives, in which gender-exclusive references are used as they would be used in a real situation. For this reason, some prayers will be directed to a female and others to a male. All are interchangeable.

S c r i p t u r e s



Scriptures for this lesson are quoted in the lesson guide.



a prayer for the wounded burden bearer...

Dear Lord,

I bring before You _____, who because of Your call has in all earnestness been carrying people in her heart and faithfully interceding for them. But somewhere along the way, she became weighed down with the heaviness of the sins of others and forgot Your yoke is to be easy and Your burden light. She has tried to take more than You intended, and as a result has been growing weaker and more frustrated each day. Burden-bearing has become painful to her, much like a torn ligament or muscle which causes her to wince with every step. We ask that You touch that torn place with Your power and heal it. Cradle _____ in Your arms so that she can rest. Lord, bring the gift of burden-bearing to death on the cross. Let it be Yours again, so it will not possess and control _____. She wants You to own both her and the gift, Lord, to use for Your glory.

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