

## SESSION FOUR ~ TEACHING NOTES

# THE CORPORATE NATURE OF HUMANITY AND BURDEN BEARING

### INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to have a corporate nature?

*I Corinthians 12:12-27 NKJV - <sup>12</sup> For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For in fact the body is not one member but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? <sup>18</sup> But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. <sup>19</sup> And if they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. <sup>23</sup> And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, <sup>25</sup> that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

If you are corporate, you are one of many making up “the one.”

There are those of you who readily categorize yourselves as social beings. You choose to seek out others of your kind and be part of a group. It is your nature to be corporate, to be one of many making up one – one family, one group, one tribe, etc.

If you choose to separate or isolate yourself from the rest of the body, you do not have access to the strength of the whole and therefore weaken yourself. This is why the enemy works so hard to cause division and separation-when you are alone you are easy prey.

The enemy knows that you are the strongest and the most uniquely individual when you are safely part of the whole.

You see it with children. In the safety of family, they can be outrageously funny, amazingly creative, or stubbornly persistent. However, among strangers where they do not feel safe, they may become silent and unresponsive.

Being a part of the whole gives you the strength and confidence to be a strong individual.

We need to move into living more consciously corporate – we need to become more aware of our corporate nature.

We need to be aware that we all affect one another because we are all connected. As a member of the corporate Body you will either strengthen the whole or weaken the whole.

## **I. EMPATHY ESSENTIAL TO CORPORATENESS**

### **A. Empathy Promotes Unity**

Empathy is the glue that makes connectedness possible. Unity, being of like mind and spirit, is the visible outworking of your corporate nature, and unity does not happen without empathy.

Empathy is what makes being a responsible part of the group happen. Empathy is essential to healthy relationships, and without it, intimacy is impossible.

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would identify and empathize with mankind, but also go on to make the only substitutionary sacrifice needed.

*Isaiah 53:4-5 NKJV – <sup>4</sup> Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

Paul states the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice in Hebrews 7:24-25.

*Hebrews 7:24-25 NKJV - <sup>24</sup> But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

Jesus lives to intercede for us. He lives in you and intercedes continually for you. You join Him in His work of restoration and reconciliation as He calls your attention to trouble in others; you feel it and put words to the desires of His heart.

Salvation is all about the restoration of intimate relationships between God and man. Burden bearing is a part of that restoration process, and underneath that burden bearing is our corporate nature.

If you do not intercede for others, you fail to allow Jesus to live His intercessory life through you.

Your ability to identify and empathize with others will never be as complete as that of Jesus, but through His Holy Spirit in you, you can bear burdens effectively.

We would not be able to lay our lives down for each other at all or to love each other at all if we were not able to feel, sense, or know something of what another individual experiences.

It is this corporate nature that the Holy Spirit taps into when calling you into empathetic burden bearing intercession.

Paul taught that we are members of the corporate Body and when one member suffers, we all suffer, even as when a toe is hurt, it affects the whole body.

*I Corinthians 12:26 NKJV - And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

Paul also taught that we need each other to function properly, that we are to come alongside those who struggle under an overwhelming, crushing load and help them through it.

## **B. Individualism vs. Corporateness**

In our Western culture and mindset we logically agree with the idea of corporateness, but we don't fully "get it." Our culture elevates individualism above community. The concept of corporateness is an abstract, intellectual concept with little emotion connected.

For the Hebrew culture, and for Middle Easterners, "oneness or connectedness" evokes deep, strong emotions regarding family, extended family, tribe, etc.

It evokes love, passion, duty, and responsibility for the life and reputation of a host of people at a depth that is nearly impossible for the Westerner to understand.

Western society has become so individualistic that this concept of oneness or corporateness, of how what you do affects those around you, is lost to consciousness. Nevertheless, your corporate life is real; the way you live your life does affect those around you.

What I do and think in private can pollute my spirit and when I come into your presence you will bear that because you will pick it up.

We will either strengthen the whole or weaken the whole. We will either have a positive or negative affect.

We see an example of how one man's actions affected a whole nation in Genesis 20.

Abraham lied to King Abimelech, telling him Sarah was his sister rather than his wife. Abimelech took Sarah into his household because of her beauty and suddenly all the wombs of the women in the kingdom were closed. No babies!

Abimelech was warned in a dream by God that he should not touch Sarah but return her to Abraham.

The next morning Abimelech says to Abraham...

*Genesis 20:9-10 NKJV - "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." <sup>10</sup> Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"*

Abimelech understood that the actions of one man affected the entire kingdom – the wombs of all the women in the land were closed! All the people of the land were bearing the burden of one man's sin!

*Genesis 20:17-18 NKJV - <sup>17</sup> So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; <sup>18</sup> for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.*

Confession and intercession on the part of Abraham opened the way to remedy a negative situation and bring healing and restoration.

People have generally lost the sense of being a part of something bigger than they are. We live our lives in the moment and for ourselves, unaware that what we do and how we live life affects others both now and in the future.

That lack of awareness can lead you as an individual to feel that what you do and who you are does not matter, to feel as if you are not part of a community.

Empathy has the power to revitalize and maintain a vibrant relationship with God as well as build unity of heart and mind in families, communities, and people groups if we actively, consciously use it as the Lord intended.

## **II. IS BURDEN BEARING BIBLICAL?**

Christians must ground beliefs in the Word of God; your knowledge of burden bearing can be no exception. Several Scriptures show burden bearing as a form of intercessory prayer.

### **A. Daniel**

The prophet and statesman Daniel “deeply identified” with the spiritual turmoil of his people, and that was why he was able to voice such a great intercessory prayer.

*Daniel 9:3-5 NKJV - <sup>3</sup> Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. <sup>4</sup> And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.*

### **B. Ezekiel**

Ezekiel was considered the “burden bearing” prophet and experienced things in ways other prophets had not, and his experiences anticipated the activity of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

*Ezekiel 3:14b-15 NKJV - The hand of the LORD was strong upon me. <sup>15</sup> Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.*

Ezekiel had been given powerful visions and words from God and then was transported by the Spirit to where the captives were. For 7 days he carried the burden of the things he saw in his spirit. He was astonished, deeply distressed, and overwhelmed.

Later he was to so identify with the people that in a prophetic act God would lay the iniquity of His people on Ezekiel.

*Ezekiel 4:4-5 NKJV - <sup>4</sup> "Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. <sup>5</sup> For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. <sup>6</sup> And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.*

Ezekiel spent 413 days incapacitated as a prophetic act of burden-bearing intercession.

### **C. The Apostle Paul**

Paul gives an empathetic plea for the churches in Galatia and Corinth.

*Galatians 4:19 NKJV - My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.*

Paul carried them in his spirit as a burden bearer interceding for them and speaking truth to them. The Holy Spirit connected Paul with these people even from a great distance.

*2 Corinthians 11:28-29 NLT - <sup>28</sup> Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?*

Paul empathized with these people and felt their struggle and continually prayed for them.

## **III. BURDEN BEARING RIGHTLY**

### **A. Empathy Awareness**

Empathy is not something you can choose to have or not have. However, you can, and must choose to be conscious of when you are empathizing, and subsequently absorbing burdens.

This absorbing quality of your spirit is a function of your humanity as much as walking and talking.

We all absorb burdens but not all of us bear them to the cross of Jesus.

Just as you learn to walk and talk, you must learn to be aware consciously of what your spirit does naturally. You must learn to bear burdens rightly so that you do not wear them as your own.

You must become aware of empathy working in you so that when “something comes over you” and you are “not yourself” you can call on the Lord for His help.

Then even as you are absorbing burdens empathetically and carrying them to the Cross, you can receive His wisdom and the strength to do what He asks of you.

This awareness will help guard against the confusion that can come with or as a result of empathetic connection – you will be able to intercede for a depressed person, be with them in their pain without falling into their depression, thinking it is your own.

When you are able to recognize those times when you absorb emotional, spiritual, and psychological baggage through empathy, you will be able to call on the Lord in the moment.

He draws the burden through you, lifts it up and out of you and onto His Cross. Thus, the weight does not accumulate and crush you.

As you learn to recognize when you are burden bearing, you will be able to more quickly listen and hear His direction for how and where to direct prayer, and for instructions about how to relate to a person in a way that is strategically helpful.

When you are consciously aware of empathetic burden bearing in the moment, you can choose to participate, to be proactive rather than reactive.

Knowing you are burden bearing will make it possible to receive more grace to restrain knee-jerk reactions that arise from what you are “picking up.”

Example: Through empathy you absorb a friend’s anger. If you are not aware that it is not your anger you may lash out in anger. If you are aware that it is not “your” anger or issue then you can turn to the Lord in that moment and receive His grace.

Conscious awareness of when you empathize and bear burdens will mean that you will more consistently do the Father’s will.

This awareness will result in wiser, more gracious prayers and interactions with other people.

**B. Centrality of the Holy Spirit**

High sensitivity is core to empathy, and empathy is core to burden bearing – but burden bearing rightly only happens through the Person of the Holy Spirit.

When you invited the Holy Spirit to be in charge of the empathetic functioning of your spirit, He directs that sensitivity appropriately, and protects you so you do not exhaust yourself.

You can and do bear burdens without the Holy Spirit, but you do so in your own strength. This means that as you sit in the pain of another, and absorb a portion of their burden empathetically, you have no means of releasing it other than through distance and time.

If you distance yourself from the source of pain, over time it dissipates. However, it leaves a residue in you if the Holy Spirit does not “clean you out.”

Residue collects more readily on already sensitive areas, especially when the burden’s content is similar to your own tender spots. Collecting there, it weighs down your spirit, exhausts your body, and confuses your mind.

More and more catches and slowly builds and eventually you are overwhelmed, used up, and burned out. You have no desire to allow anyone to be close. You withdraw to protect your spirit, body, mind, and emotions.

We need the Holy Spirit to rightly bear burdens.

The Holy Spirit works with your empathy, gathers up the burdens you absorb naturally, and takes them out of your spirit, body, mind, and emotions.

The Holy Spirit neutralizes them upon the Cross and makes a way for the healing, restorative love of the Father to wash over you, renewing, rather than exhausting you!

**C. Importance of the Cross**

The Cross is the destination.

This is the place you want the Holy Spirit to take you because this is where the weight of burdens comes off. Only the Holy Spirit in you can relieve you of burdens cleanly and effectively.



When we take burdens to the Cross we are acknowledging the work Jesus did there. The Cross of Jesus is the stopping place of all sin, all pain and distress. Burdens left there cannot have life or power over you.

Jesus allows us to participate in His ministry of reconciling and restoring people to relationship with God, with others and themselves.

*2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NKJV - <sup>18</sup> Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

You participate with Jesus as you voice a prayer that catches up a burden on the Father's heart, a prayer that invites Jesus into a suffering individual's situation.

This is an awesome privilege!

## **SUMMARY**

Empathy is what enables us to be connected to one another and helps cultivate unity.

Through empathy we begin to absorb burdens from others and we must learn to turn to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to direct us to the Cross where we acknowledge the work of Christ and release the burden to Him.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for the privilege I have of being a part of the corporate body. Help me to understand that I am at my strongest and most unique when I am a part of the whole. I recognize that what I do or do not do impacts the rest of the body. Help me to strengthen the body instead of weaken it. Forgive me for any tendency I have in separating or isolating myself from the body*

*Jesus, thank for the privilege of joining You in Your ministry of intercession.*

*Lord, teach me how a burden feels when You want to draw a burden from someone, through me for direct delivery to the Cross. Help me learn what my own burdens feel like, then help me know what someone else's feel like. Forgive me for carrying them all because I didn't know the difference between them. Amen!*

## **SESSION FOUR – ACTIVATION WORKSHEET INSTRUCTIONS**

Allow the students 5-10 minutes to fill in the worksheet and then get into groups of 4 to share their experiences and insights, and then pray for help in burden bearing rightly.

## SESSION FOUR ~ ACTIVATION WORKSHEET

1. Have you ever picked up someone else's...

- anger
- depression
- joy
- grief
- pain
- confusion
- offense
- positive energy

2. Describe a time when you felt "something come over you" and you were "not yourself". Can you make the connection to empathy being at work?

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3. What insights did you gain from this lesson?

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4. Get into groups of four and share some of your experiences of when you absorbed other people's emotions and burdens. Share any insights you gained through this lesson.

Pray for one another – that God would help each one bear burdens rightly.