

# Yes, Bear Burdens—But Must They Bear Mine?

By Jim Elliff



I once met a man who had suffered a near fatal gunshot wound in the crossfire of others in downtown Chicago. He was paralyzed for the remainder of his life. His wife had to care for him every day and in every way. Yet, in the difficult process of his early days as an invalid, he was converted to Christ. He was so thankful God had saved him. In fact, he attributes much of that to what he believed was the gracious providence of being shot. This was a critical “on-the-ground” instrument

of God to point him to Christ. But why not go on to heaven now? Why must his wife and family suffer because of him?

My wife and I have the privilege of taking care of her mother who is unable to do much at all. She is not that far off from being 100 years of age! She is pleasant and Christlike, but what goes on in her mind as she thinks of her condition? She wonders, “Why must I put my family out to care for me? Wouldn’t it be better if I went on to Christ now?”

I don’t think such thoughts are foreign to every older person at some point.

Our first approach to mold our thinking should be that God has ordained old age for some. This is so helpful to think on. In fact, he has ordained the exact number of days we will live. It is no surprise to him if you get old or even become an invalid. In fact, the Bible teaches that all things are ordained by him.

Your eyes have seen my unshaped substance;  
And in Your book all of them were written  
The days that were formed for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them.  
(Psalms 139:16 LSB)

This knowledge of God’s sovereign control over his world is our friend, for God’s purposes for the believer are for his or her own good and God’s glory (Romans 8:28-30). Poet William Cowper (1731-1800), though suffering from depression at critical times in his life, wrote of this providential oversight of God. Ponder the words of “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.”

God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill;  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence,  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding ev’ry hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flow’r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.

Concerning this sovereign will of God, there is one more matter to consider: God has ordained that all of us become a burden to others in the Body of Christ. Think over these meaningful words of British theologian John Stott (1921-2011). He wrote this at 88 years of age in *The Radical Disciple*. I will end with them.

I sometimes hear old people, including Christian people who should know better say, ‘I don’t want to be a burden to anyone else. I’m happy to carry on living so long as I can look after myself, but as soon as I become a burden I would rather die.’ But this is wrong. We are all designed to be a burden to others. You are designed to be a burden to me, and I am designed to be a burden to you. And the life of the family, including the life of the local church family, should be one of ‘mutual burdensomeness.’ ‘Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ’ (Galatians 6:2).

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