

THE BAGS WE CARRY

My daughter turned 17 last Friday. Every year on the eve of my daughter's birthday Nadine and I will reminisce about the events that transpired on the day before her birth. We always recount how we went on a walk that night and talked about packing the bag we would take to the hospital when the time came. We planned on packing the bag the next day even though Nadine was only just past the 33-week mark at the time. Little did we know at that time that we would need the bag packed sooner.

We had just settled into bed that night when Nadine's water broke. We had to pack a bag very quickly and head right away to the hospital. We spent the next 17 days at London's Sick Kids' Hospital until we could finally bring our daughter home. On the eve of my daughter's birthday, we always remember talking about the need of getting that bag ready.

Last Thursday night on the eve of my daughter's 17th birthday I found myself carrying basketball bags out to the car heading off to practice. Carrying these bags got me thinking back to the night before our daughter was born and of the many changes we have experienced in these 17 years with her.

This walk down memory lane last week not only got me thinking about some of the bags I have carried for Coral through the years but reminded me how we all carry many bags through the course of our lives. The kinds of bags we have carried through the seasons of life are many. Parents may remember the bags they took with them to the hospital for the birth of their child and the diaper bags they carried for a few years after that. Having children, chances are we have packed and carried our fair share of backpacks and school lunches over the years. Parents with children in sports have had to carry their hockey bags or gym bags. Then there are the many bags and suitcases we have carried navigating through airports or hotels while on vacation. We have all carried our fair share of grocery bags and sometimes have had them rip in our hands. Golfers may have carried their golf bags around a course before getting wise and using a cart. During the Christmas season, we have carried bags coming out of the mall containing our gift purchases. Then there are the purses that have to be carried, or the brief cases and computer bags we take to work. We may even carry a few bags under our eyes at times depending

on how little sleep we are getting. These are just some of the bags we carry during the course of our lives.

Sometimes the bags we carry are heavy and other times they are light. If the bags we are carrying are filled with burdens, then they become extremely heavy. Think of some of the burdens we have had to carry at times:

- care giving for an elderly parent while at the same time raising a family,
- pressures and demands at work,
- concerns about our health or for somebody close to us,
- financial obligations,
- balancing commitments and obligations to work and family in our already tight schedules.

These kinds of burdens make the bags we are carrying seem very heavy and may lead us to thinking we are carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders. Thankfully, Jesus makes an incredible offer to help us when we find our burdens too heavy. He makes this offer in Matthew 11:28-30:

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.

Jesus promises to provide rest for everyone who comes to Him carrying heavy burdens. The rest that Jesus is promising here is to partner with us in dealing with these burdens, and by so doing make it easier for us to cope and manage. By having Jesus' strength, wisdom, help and encouragement working alongside us, we will feel relieved knowing we are not dealing with these burdens alone. Some changes we may notice when we do this are:

- how our loads are seeming a lot easier and lighter to carry,
- how our frowns are starting to turn back into smiles again,
- how our cries of distress are turning back into songs of joy,
- how our feelings of despair are replaced with peace and happiness.

Jesus is not promising here that we will not have burdens to carry at times in life, but He is ensuring He will be there to lighten the load for us physically, emotionally, and spiritually if we simply come to Him. We know how good Jesus is at keeping His promises. The promises surrounding the cross should be proof to us of this.

Seventeen years ago, we carried a bag to the hospital preparing for the early arrival of our daughter's birth. For 17 days we carried the burdens of going through the emotional ups and downs that come with a child born very premature. By taking Jesus up on His offer, the loads and burdens we carried were certainly lightened until we could bring our daughter safely home. He knew at that time that one day I would be carrying a basketball bag to the car for my daughter. It took me quite a few years to find that out.

Keep Safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean