



## “The Basket Of Burdens”

October 2021

While out on the streets recently, one of our members approached me with the following question. "Why is my life so filled with challenges and tribulations, while it seems that those around me have it easier?" I responded, and "who said that those around you have it easier?" It brought to mind a great parable story, "The Basket of Burdens"... Some years ago, a group of conventioners gathered at a ski resort to conduct their annual meeting. It was autumn, so there was no snow and no skiing, but the town was picturesque and the fall scenery was as pretty as a postcard. The leaves were scarlet and the mountains surrounding the town were spectacular.

Hundreds of conventioners came from every part of the country. Young and old, rich, and poor, and in all shapes and sizes. They shared common interests, though their backgrounds and careers were quite varied.

Twenty of the conventioners were put up at a large bed and breakfast near the outskirts of town. A little off the beaten path and nestled on the side of the mountain, the large Victorian house offered the perfect view and was an ideal setting for the weary travelers. After a few days, the guests became better acquainted, friendships developed, and a camaraderie was felt within the group.

The newfound friends seemed to particularly enjoy the lighthearted conversation that took place every evening after dinner in front of the inn's huge stone fireplace. As the logs blazed, the fire cast a beautiful dancing glow around the main room. Some sat in rocking chairs, others snuggled on the large sofas, and there were those who enjoyed sitting on the blankets and pillows on the floor. Everyone sipped their beverages and laughed at the stories told of their day's convention activities.

But one night the stories around the fireplace took a different twist. The conversation turned serious when Mike, a young man in his 20's, confessed that he had just been diagnosed with cancer. While it was treatable and he stood an excellent chance of being cured, he was nonetheless distraught.

A middle aged couple, Tom and Cheryl, offered their support and understanding. They had just been informed that their child needed a kidney transplant. The news had been emotionally devastating to the family.

A woman tearfully explained how she had recently lost her husband to a car accident. Another person told that he had just lost his job and was at wit's end.

The evening turned gut wrenching as others began to describe horrible aspects of their "normal" lives or lives of their loved ones. From depression and drug addiction, to eating disorders and relationship problems -- no one seemed immune from some sort of hardship.

Finally, an elderly gentleman -- a man who was at the convention by himself and only known to the group as Mr. Hayes, interjected himself into the conversation.

Mr. Hayes had a distinguished look about him, and while no one knew exactly where he came from, he spoke with a gentle voice that engendered confidence and assuredness. During the past days, he had smiled and laughed, evidently enjoying the company, but he had not said very much.

People just looked at him and thought he was a "nice old man". After listening to everyone's concerns and problems, Mr. Hayes looked over at the hostess and asked her if she could get a paper and pen for everyone in the room. She returned in a minute, complying with the unusual request.

"Do me a favor," Mr. Hayes asked. "We're going to try something, and I need your cooperation. On the small piece of paper please write down the 3 biggest problems and burdens you are facing in your personal life right now. Don't sign your name. We'll keep it confidential."

The group began to ponder and found the experiment fascinating, not knowing what was to follow. After everyone was done writing down their problems, Mr. Hayes asked everyone to fold their paper and place it in a small basket that was placed in front of the fireplace. There were curious looks throughout the room, but again, everyone cooperated, wondering what would happen next.

Mr. Hayes shook the basket and held it above everyone's head as he walked around the room and asked each person to pick a paper from the basket. After he was done, he sat back down and looked around the room.

"Friends, open the paper and just read to yourself the problems that you chose," Mr. Hayes explained. "And please, be as honest as you can."

Then, Mr. Hayes glanced at the woman sitting on his left and asked, "Lisa, would you like to trade your problems that you wrote down with those that you chose from the basket?" "No," Lisa said. Next, Mr. Hayes asked the man sitting next to Lisa the same question.

"Would you like to trade the problems you wrote down for those that you chose from the basket?" Again the reply was "No." Mr. Hayes went around the entire room. Everyone had a chance to respond. Remarkably, the answers were all the same -- no, no, no, no, no... Comments ranged from "I can deal with my own problems, but I can't deal with what I chose out of the basket," to "Wow - these make my problems look like nothing. Forget this."

Mr. Hayes settled back in his cushioned rocking chair while the fire crackled in the background. He asked, "Do your problems seem so difficult now when you see what others must endure? Most of you wish you were in someone else's shoes, and yet, when you get a chance to trade your problems for theirs, none of you are willing.

"Don't you see? Tonight, you've learned, by your own admissions, that despite the hardships you face, and despite the worries that grind away at you and cause you to lose sleep at night -- despite all that -- you've come to appreciate and understand the simple fact that the problems you face are nothing compared to what others must deal with. Considering everyone else's problems, your own problems seem manageable. If nothing else, that's something to be grateful for.

"Sure, we like to complain. It's our nature and it's also therapeutic to express ourselves and get our frustrations off our chests. There is nothing wrong with that, and in fact, it can be a healthy thing to do. It helps us sort things out. And heaven knows, we can always find something to complain about."

The group found themselves mesmerized with Mr. Hayes' comments, with several people shaking their heads in agreement, as if something amazing has just dawned on them.

"But friends," he said, "the burdens that have been placed upon us are there for a reason. Because without our problems, we would not search for answers. And if we led our lives without searching for answers, we would never become better, or stronger, or more understanding. Sometimes it takes a serious problem to wake us up to what's really important in life. As an example, you'll find that many of the answers you're looking for can be found by helping others facing similar problems, and that act of service is what's really important. "You see, the key to your enrichment, to your happiness and peace, is to take the problems you

have and look at them as a chance to find an answer. Learn your lessons well, and then to take those lessons and answers and use them to become a better person -- for yourself and for others. I'm not saying you must like the challenges you face. No one does. But you can look at those challenges as an opportunity to do some good.

"Ironically, the power to do that comes from the very things you see as problems and setbacks. That's what most people don't understand. For every setback you experience there is an equal or greater blessing that accompanies it. You may not realize this, but your struggles are allowing you to become a better person each and every day. You just have to open your eyes and see it.

"The blessings that come from your struggles are sometimes hidden and many times you have to look long and hard. But by finding them in due course, and by counting those blessings, you will discover a secret of the ages, an undeniable truth, which seems to have escaped most of humanity.

"That secret is very simple: The more you count your blessings, the more blessings are bestowed upon you. If you don't believe me, just try it and see what happens." The group was spellbound, just staring at Mr. Hayes, reflecting upon his words, his sincerity, and conviction. His comforting knowledge seemed to vanquish the stresses and worries which had infected the earlier conversation. The young man who was diagnosed with cancer was determined to use his experience to educate others on the importance of early detection. The couple with a son who needed a kidney transplant dedicated themselves to join the campaign to encourage others to sign donor cards. The woman who had lost her husband decided to carry on his memory by volunteering to pick up where her husband had left off in his community work. The man who had lost his job, told himself that he would use this opportunity to do what he had always wanted to do -- write a book that he had been thinking about for years.

Rather than dwelling on their problems, everyone had learned to use their problems as a steppingstone toward bettering themselves and helping others. Rather than getting wrapped up in self-pity, the experience of confronting their problems and seeking answers proved to be a valuable lesson indeed. Someone commented, "Now I finally realize what looking at the glass as half full means." The Moral of the story is: No matter how heavy your burden, there is someone out there who has it worse. Stop, count your blessings, and try to live one day at a time. Life is a gift enjoy your present.

And before we close how about a bit of humor from the files, "A present for the Wife".....

After being away on business, Tim thought it would be nice to bring his wife a little gift.

"How about some perfume?" he asked the cosmetics clerk. She showed him a bottle costing \$50.00.

"That's a bit much," said Tim, so she returned with a smaller bottle for \$30.00. "That's still quite a bit," Tim complained. Growing annoyed, the clerk brought out a tiny \$15.00 bottle.

"What I mean," said Tim, "is I'd like to see something really cheap."

The clerk handed him a mirror...LOL!

Compliments of your Police Chaplain

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