

Baggage

"What Are You Carrying? - Part 1"

Psalm 40:11-12 MSG

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"Now God, don't hold out on me, don't hold back your passion. Your love and truth are all that keeps me together. When troubles ganged up on me, a mob of sins past counting, I was so swamped by guilt I couldn't see my way clear. More guilt in my heart than hair on my head, so heavy the guilt that my heart gave out."

King David was well into his reign as king at this point when he was writing this psalm. He was reflecting back on God's faithfulness and all the things that God had done in his life. But, after all this time, he's going through some stuff, and still carrying some emotional and mental baggage that he hadn't quite shed yet. David wasn't a perfect man, but he loved God and he knew how to get real and how to get honest, so he began to cry out to God. The guilt was so heavy he felt like boulders were on his back weighing him down.

David was crying out to God who had been faithful, but he still felt this heaviness. Some of us can identify with King David and say, *"God, I've still got some baggage in my life. There are hurts, habits, hang-ups, and history weighing me down in my spirit that I've accumulated over years and decades."* We all have baggage and it comes in different shapes, sizes and forms. We might have some *fear* baggage or some *insecurity* baggage. Maybe we've got trust issues or *anger* baggage or we're carrying some offense, bitterness, or unforgiveness.

Baggage of control issues can develop by trying to take control of a life that feels like it's out of control. Baggage takes on different forms - addictions, obsessions, fixations, lies, false identities, sadness that won't go away - sickness that seems like it'll never end - sorrow, grief, pain, abuse, betrayal, baggage of traumatic events - things that occurred decades ago and yet somehow are still with us today. But God made us to travel *light* - he didn't make us to be a professional baggage handler. Jesus doesn't want us traveling with any unnecessary baggage.

Baggage comes from two main places. Some of it we accumulate by no fault of our own. We live in a fallen world and some baggage is put on us by others. Sometimes we've been burdened by other people. In all kinds of ways and for all kinds of reasons, they didn't *lighten* our load, they added *to* it and made it a lot *heavier*.

Then there's other baggage that we put on ourselves through personal choices we make that are inconsistent with God's will and his Word and the truth that he's given us to live by. Some of our baggage is self-inflicted, but, however we got it, we find ourselves carrying more things and heavier things than we ever intended to. Most baggage is rooted in our mind and ends up poisoning our heart, and it cripples our ability to live and love and serve, and be the people who God made us to be. This is why Jesus is so passionate to help us begin to lay down and unpack the baggage that we've been carrying.

Strongholds, thought patterns, belief systems, and false ideas, over time, literally become ruts and pathways in our mind that just get deeper and deeper the longer we live in them. Everyone has baggage. The key is to find someone who loves us enough to help us unpack. Some things that are actually good and meant to help us can instead become baggage, like fear. Some fear is meant to protect us - to move us out of a moment, a situation, or a season and protect us from certain things.

But, sometimes fear ends up becoming a permanent resident in our heart and in our mind and it goes from helping to hurting. When it's past the moment of saving us from trouble, and it becomes a bag that we're carrying, fear goes from being helpful to hurtful. Grief, sorrow, and sadness aren't bad things. They're gifts from God to help us process and deal with difficult things we all face in a troubled world. But when grief, sadness, and sorrow become permanent residents in our heart and life, it all becomes a bag and not a helper - then, it's just *baggage*.

Sometimes what God means to be a *moment* in our life ends up becoming a *memento* that we keep forever. Sometimes what's meant to be only for a season ends up becoming a past that we keep going back to, and we become season-pass holders for all the baggage of hurt, trauma, and shame. God doesn't want us to permanently hold all the baggage of our past. There are seasons in our life that are meant to just come and go. But the thing that remains constant as they go is Jesus who loves us all the way through them.

Some people have carried baggage so long they don't know where the baggage starts or ends and where *they* begin. It literally becomes a *part* of them. It's not even something they're *carrying*, but it's absorbed into their very identity. Do we even separate the baggage we carry, or has it become who we are? Proverbs 14:13 says, "*Laughter can conceal a heavy heart. But when the laughter ends, the grief remains.*" Some of us try to put band-aids on gunshot wounds. We can cover up the hole, but that doesn't fix the wound. Or, we can avoid it. We can act like it's not there and just laugh it off like it's no big deal, but really, it's crippling our soul.

But, Jesus says, *"We've got to heal the gunshot wound. We need to get you in intensive care so we can remove the bullet and close up the wound and heal you and then unpack this bag you've been carrying."* Church is not the place to hide our baggage or pretend like we don't have any. Church is the place to unpack it, release it, and be *done* with it. Some of us know we're carrying some heavy things, and we're like, *"All right, I'm so sick of carrying this stuff. I'm done with it. I'm just going to get rid of this and leave it behind."* And we try to go on. Then we're like, *"Yeah, I threw my bags away. I'm good now."*

What we forgot is that our bag has a *luggage tag* on it - and that luggage tag has our name on it - and some pesky person keeps finding that bag that we left behind and says, *"Oh, this belongs to Brian Mandel, 492 Soma Street."* We left that bag behind only to get home and find it waiting for us on our *doorstep*. Somebody delivered it back to our house, and we're like, *"Why can't I get rid of this bag? Every time I throw it away, it ends up right back on my front doorstep. Some annoying person keeps re-delivering it to me."* As much as we try to fling it away and get rid of it, it still has our *name* on it.

So what's the solution to this? Jesus. Only Jesus can remove our name and throw away what links it to us so it can't be returned to us any longer. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, *"Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you.' "* When we're sitting in places like this and the truth is being declared out loud, the devil loves to whisper in our ear, *"Yeah, that's for them, not for you. That's for somebody else. You're disqualified. You don't count."* Some of our baggage could be that whole thought process right there. But Jesus says, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

He says, *"Take my yoke upon you."* That's like an ancient-world way of saying, *"Hey, how about you take My bag instead of your bag? I want to do a bag-swap with you."* But we say, *"All right, maybe some other time. Right now I have to go to work and just make it through another day. Life stinks so hard. Yeah, all right - I'll go to church - I'll see you on Sunday - Praise Jesus - I love singing and worshiping - Okay, let's pray - Yeah! - Okay, I'm going to go bless some people now."* And people are like, *"Oh, yeah, I want to be just like you."*

Then Jesus shows up and says, *"Hey, bro. How' you doing? Uh, you know, my yoke is pretty light - feeling pretty good. Let's see what I got in my bag. You know, just want to make sure I'm prepared for this trip. Oh, yeah. Prepared. Got what I need. Candy - snack for the plane - good to go. What are you carrying? That looks heavy. You want to trade? How about all of this and you can have my bag? What do you say?"* He says, *"Take my yoke upon you. Because my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

He says, "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 that I give you - not the burden you give yourself - not the burden everybody else on this planet gave you - the burden I give you is light. I'm really good at removing the identifiers to your past. I can take all the luggage tags off those old bags and they won't be re-delivered to you any longer, and you can just carry what I have for you. All of your stuff will fit in My bag. There's nothing you need for this life that won't fit in the bag that I've already prepared for you - the yoke that I have for you. I'll even pack everything you need Myself for this life."

We're his kids and our Father's got *big shoulders*. He'll pack what's needed and he'll carry everything. He can carry all the bags. He says, "Take my yoke upon you. You're like a scrawny little muskrat and I'm like a huge ox. You can put your head up into the other side of this yoke with me, but all of the weight is on My shoulders." And so we walk together with Jesus, and as long as we stay in step with him, he bears all the weight. But when we de-couple ourself from him, the weight returns to us because we have to walk with him to get the benefit of his broad, strong shoulders bearing the weight that we would otherwise be carrying.

Exodus 6:6 AMP

"Accordingly, say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will free you from their bondage, and I will rescue you with an outstretched arm [with special and vigorous action] and by mighty acts of judgment."

The Egyptians were a type of what the world is to us today - what the enemy does in our life - the sin and death and all of the stuff that enslaves and binds and addicts us. He says, "I will remove the burden of this world from you just like I did for my people Israel all those years ago. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will free you from their bondage and I will rescue you with an outstretched arm. I will vigorously work to get these burdens off of you."

When we're willing to release and let go of the baggage, the burdens, the bondage, the sin and the junk, he sets us free and he judges it once and for all. But when we refuse to let go of it, at some point, whether now or in eternity, that junk - that sin, that baggage, that *stuff* will be judged by God. And if we're determined to cling to it while he judges it, we can get judged along with it. But he's saying, "I want to separate the baggage from you. I will judge it and I will set you free."

In Isaiah 59, God says to the people, "Your sins have separated you from Me. I didn't separate Myself from you. Your sins, your junk, your stuff, your baggage that you refuse to let go of, has separated you from Me." So, we can either separate ourselves from him because we're determined to *own* this stuff forever or, we can let God separate the sin and the stuff and the junk from us - let *him judge* it and set us *free*.

This is the invitation of the Gospel. This is Jesus's invitation to us and to everyone. He says, "*Let me remove it from you. I have a bag for you. It's easy. It's light. Follow me.*" We need to understand that *we* are not our *stuff*. This is not our *identity*. Our identity is *in him*. He's the one who defines who we are, not all the things that happened to us and that we did and accumulated for ourself.

What does baggage do when we persist in carrying it? Number one, baggage makes God's way of living seem impossible and ridiculous. When we read our Bible, we think to ourself, "*There's no way I could live like that. That sounds absurd. That's ridiculous.*" That's what we feel like as we read about light and free people carrying the burden that Jesus had for them - doing amazing exploits with and for God - and we feel like we have zero capacity to do that because we're so weighed down. That makes God's way of living seem ridiculous and impossible.

Baggage is ultimately a fixation on something in our life besides Jesus that ends up becoming our master and making us its slave. This is why Jesus hates our baggage so much - because we get *enslaved* to it - we're *mastered* by it. Baggage is always rooted in the past and is always detrimental to our future. It's like driving our car backwards and using the rearview mirror to see by and just slamming on the pedal full-speed. Always looking back shrinks down our view compared to the wide panorama that's right in front of us.

Often *words* can end up becoming the heaviest bags that we carry - words that have been spoken to or about us, and sometimes words we speak about ourselves. The phrase, "*Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me*" is a lie. Words can crush our spirit. The heaviest bags many of us carry are the words that have been buried deep down on the inside of us. What has been spoken to us over and over hangs over us like a crow. There's only one thing that can flush out words that have become baggage in our life, and that's the words of Truth.

We've been given a Book - a love letter from God to us. These words are the words of life and Truth. If we've seen Jesus, we've seen this Word because Jesus and the Word are inseparable - they're one and the same. Jesus is the manifestation of everything this Word talks about, and only when we begin to flush out the words that are on the inside of us with words that are actually true and from God will we begin to be able to let go of and release the words that have become the greatest baggage in our life.

We want to remove the luggage tag, but only the Word of God getting down deep on the inside of our heart washes, cleanses, and renews us with the truth of what God is speaking and can remove the identifying factors of those past words that have plagued us for years. Only the truth that God has spoken to each one of us is powerful enough to re-formulate and re-shape the very physicality of our brain, our mind, and our heart.

1 Samuel 25:13 ESV

“And David said to his men, ‘Every man strap on his sword!’ And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.”

Four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred dressed the part, but ultimately stayed back with the *baggage*. They couldn't let it go - wouldn't let it go. Do we want to live *looking* the part or do we want to live the part? Do we want to make *other* people think we have it, or do we want to *know* that we've been changed from the inside out and *know* we have it?

Psalms 55:22 AMP

“Cast your burden on the Lord [releasing the weight of it] and He will sustain you; He will never allow the [consistently] righteous to be moved (made to slip, fall, or fail).”

The accumulation of past baggage makes small things in the present seem huge, overwhelming, unmanageable - the straw that breaks the camel's (*our*) back. If we're already loaded down, even small things seem impossible. It's not that God is going to erase our memory or the past, but He can and will shrink it down to its proper size so that it becomes a reference point of personal experience and a tool for ministry to others while not being a current burden to *us*. We spend way more energy trying to compensate and learning to live with our baggage than it would actually take to unpack it. It's time to stop “doing the best we can” and start living in God's best.

That means we get up every single day and say, *“God, I'm a mess, but I want to walk with You. God, You know what a goofball I am, but I choose You today and I choose You tomorrow and I choose You the next day and the next day and the next day. I choose Your bag, not my bags.”* He says, *“I will never let the person who consistently makes a choice to walk with me to be burdened in a way they can't bear. I won't let it happen.”* That doesn't mean we won't have “*stuff*.” It means he won't let us be burdened in a way that we can't bear it well and successfully and with joy in our heart. He will help us and *he* will make our load *lighter*. He will. This is our God ...*this is what he does*.

Prayer - *Father, Your word is Truth. Your Word is more powerful than every word that has ever been spoken to or about us. Lord, for all those words and things and weights and burdens that have gotten lodged and crammed in our hearts and minds and souls, Lord, You are able to lighten the load. Lord, You are able to remove the baggage, to take off the luggage tag, and to give us what You have designed for us to carry. So Lord, we ask You, would You take our bags? Lord, we give them to you right now by faith. Lord, give us a tangible sense that You're moving in our heart, in our body, and our soul right now. Thank You that You love us, Lord. You came to judge our junk and to set us free. In Jesus' name. Amen*