

Paul writes to the Thessalonians *For you remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters: working night and day so as not to place a burden on any of you . . .*

Matthew describes the Scribes and Pharisees as *tying up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and laying them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.* Few things are easier than moving a finger; so not to do even that is to do nothing.

The Bible has much to say about burdens. Paul writes in “Galatians” *Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ.* Jesus’ invitation is *Come to me, all of you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*

We know what it is like to feel burdened. Every one we know is bearing a burden of some kind: cancer, financial hardship, caregiving for an elderly parent, a child struggling in school, addiction. The burdens add up and weigh us down. Moreover, we feel burdened by the suffering caused from natural disasters, mass shootings, and war.

The failure to lift a finger to help others, says Jesus, springs from a heart curved in upon itself. The Scribes and Pharisees do not wish to serve but to be applauded for pious show.

When our elected leaders primp for the camera and compete for air time on cable TV before lifting a finger to reduce gun violence, before protecting voting rights, before reducing childhood poverty, they stand in a long, though not venerable tradition Jesus named “hypocrisy.”

One of Matthew’s basic theological concerns is deeds rather than doctrine. In the future the Son of Man will pass judgment only on one’s deeds. Faithful love, if it is faithful, is judgment. Jesus singles out the wiles of the scribes and Pharisees for condemnation, but the games they play are variations on the games we all play.

Whatever the Pharisees do, says Jesus, is done for show. Jesus invites us to lay down the burden of keeping up appearances to garner the admiration and adulation of others and to embrace authenticity.

Carrie Cunningham puffed out her cheeks and exhaled. She looked out at the audience filled with 2,000 of her peers, surgeons who were attending the annual meeting of the Association of Academic Surgery, a prestigious gathering of specialists from universities across the United States and Canada.

Cunningham, president of the organization, knew what she was about to reveal could cost her promotions, patients and professional standing. She took a deep breath. *I was the top junior tennis player in the United States. I’m an associate professor of surgery*

*at Harvard. But I am also a human. I am a person with lifelong depression, anxiety, and now a substance abuse disorder.*

The room fell silent. Cunningham knew others in the room were struggling, too. Doctors are dying by suicide at higher rates than the general population. Somewhere between 300 and 400 physicians a year in the US take their own lives, the equivalent of one medical school graduating class annually.

Surgeons have some of the highest known rates of suicide among physicians. Surgeons have long experienced a culture of silence when it comes to their personal pain. They are taught, throughout their grueling training, to dissociate themselves from their body's natural cues, telling them it is time to eat or to sleep.

Not many of us are surgeons but all of us know the burden of keeping up appearances, of meeting unrealistic expectations, of serving pride rather than the well-being of ourselves, our families, our neighbors. By sharing *our very selves* with others, we are freed of a heavy, back-breaking burden, and live more authentically.

Cunningham told the audience of 2,000 surgeons her story of addiction and recovery and concluded *I wish I could get those of you in this room that are struggling the courage it takes to seek help. But I can't. I can promise you that people will show up for you as you would for anyone else who asked for help.*

She was greeted with a standing ovation. Her talk has been watched 29,000 times—nearly 30 times the figure for most lectures posted by the same organization. Cunningham's phone has been ringing off the hook since her talk. Surgeons from around the globe call her to share their stories and thank her for speaking out.

She tells them *I do not have all the answers. I do know that it won't get better unless we talk about it openly and honestly.*

The Psalmist asks *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?* Each of us knows this soul ache. Pretending we don't to keep up appearances will only leave us lonely and depressed and addicted to some form of escape.

Talking about the disquiet of our souls openly and honestly is doing more than lifting a finger to help—it is creating a lifeline to the rest our souls so desperately crave.