

THE BURDEN

by Greg Sullivan



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The Burden

A new look at freedom

by Greg Sullivan

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BILL — *A middle-aged man who is living in deep regret and guilt over the mess he's made of his life. He's wearing a wrinkled business suit and his face is unshaven.*

THE LIBERATOR — *A young to middle-aged man dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. He represents Jesus. It's very important that he portrays a very approachable, caring man.*

OFF-STAGE VOICE —

An unseen reader of Scripture verses at the end of the drama.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Burdens both literal and figurative are central to this short drama, which may be performed at Lent or any other time of the year. A man encumbered by a heavy bag slowly trudges toward his destination of “freedom.” He struggles under the weight of his failures and bad memories. Then he meets the Liberator, who offers to help him shoulder the load, but the Liberator tells him, “I can’t take it from you — you have to give it to me.” This is a powerful dramatization of 1 Peter 5:7 — “Give your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.”

HYMNS: The two suggested hymns are in the public domain and may be found in many hymnals; however, appropriate selections of your choice may be substituted.

PROPS:

Large bag — This bag should be filled with some heavy, loud objects such as pans, books, and other items. The audience will never see the contents of the bag. It needs to be heavy enough so that as Bill carries it, it's obvious he is struggling.

Big stick — This should be lying on the floor of the stage. Bill will pick it up during the drama.

Handkerchief

SETTING: All of the action takes place in the aisle (preferably a center aisle) and on the platform of the sanctuary. No scenery is needed, though it would be effective to have a cross off to the side of Stage Right.

1 **HYMN:** “Come, Ye Disconsolate”

2 1. Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish,
3 Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel.
4 Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
5 Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

6

7 2. Joy of the desolate, light of the straying,
8 Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure!
9 Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying,
10 “Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot cure.”

11

12 3. Here see the bread of life, see waters flowing
13 Forth from the throne of God, pure from above.
14 Come to the feast of love; come, ever knowing
15 Earth has no sorrow but heaven can remove.

16

17 *(BILL enters the back of the auditorium. He is struggling to*
18 *carry a heavy bag. As he works his way down the center aisle,*
19 *he frequently stumbles and falls. After a few seconds, he begins*
20 *speaking to no one in particular.)*

21 **BILL:** It can't be that much farther. I've been walking for
22 hours — or has it been days? I'm so tired — and worn
23 out. *(Stumbles a bit farther.)* How could I be so stupid ...
24 so ... stupid? How can one guy screw up so many things?
25 *(Trips over an imaginary rock.)* Ouch!

26 If I had a dollar for every time I let somebody down,
27 I'd be a rich man ... Oh, yeah — I'm already a rich man.
28 Too rich. Maybe that's been my problem — too much
29 time getting money, not enough time for what matters.
30 *(He's on the stage now. He drops the bag and sits on it, pulling*
31 *out a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his face. After a few*
32 *seconds, he speaks toward the audience, not really seeing them.)*
33 Why couldn't she forgive me? Everybody makes
34 mistakes — maybe not as big as mine, but nobody's
35 perfect. *(Pauses, shaking his head.)* Who am I trying to

1 fool? *I wouldn't forgive me, so how can I expect her to?*

2 And my son — he hates me. I didn't mean to say that
3 to him. (*Shakes his head again.*) I'd give anything to have
4 that day back to do over again — to have my *life* back to
5 do over again. (*Pauses again, growing more and more*
6 *desperate.*) What a mess!

7 (*He falls to his knees.*) Oh God, I can't deal with this
8 anymore. (*He quietly sobs for a minute, then looks up with a*
9 *glimmer of hope in his eyes.*) But the man ... the man back at
10 that church. He said I could make this all go away. If I
11 just carry this ... (*Struggles to lift the bag up over his shoulder*
12 *again*) to the top of that mountain in the East, I can be
13 free — free from this ... pain that overwhelms me.

14 (*He hears a noise Off-stage Right. He drops the bag and*
15 *looks around nervously — jumpy.*) Who's there? Hello —
16 who is it? Friend or foe? (*Tries to sound imposing but it*
17 *comes across sounding quite humorous.*) Uh, halt! (*He*
18 *continues to hold the bag with one hand while he picks up a*
19 *stick with the other hand and waves it in front of him.*) I warn
20 you, I'm armed — and ... quite dangerous. (*The*
21 *LIBERATOR enters Stage Right, walking slowly, cautiously.*
22 *He's dressed casually.*)

23 LIBERATOR: Hello there. It's OK, I'm a friend.

24 BILL: Not possible — I ... don't really have any friends
25 right now.

26 LIBERATOR: Then call me a ... friendly acquaintance.
27 You're not from around here, are you?

28 BILL: (*Speaking nervously*) Well, not exactly. I'm from a long
29 way away. And I'm only passing through.

30 LIBERATOR: (*He notices the bag.*) What do you have there?

31 BILL: What, this? (*He drops the bag.*) It's just a ... a ... it's my
32 luggage. I'm on a journey.

33 LIBERATOR: A journey? Where are you headed?

34 BILL: Where am I headed? I ... I'm headed ... (*Points toward*
35 *Stage Left*) I'm headed that way.

- 1 LIBERATOR: I see. What's that way?
2 BILL: That way is ... well, over that way is where I'm
3 headed. It's the place I'm heading ... my destination.
4 LIBERATOR: And what is your destination?
5 BILL: *(With determination)* Why, it's my freedom. My destination
6 is freedom.
7 LIBERATOR: *(Thoughtful)* Freedom. Freedom is a great thing.
8 BILL: I hope so.
9 LIBERATOR: So, what will you be free from?
10 BILL: *(He lifts the bag.)* From this!
11 LIBERATOR: I was wondering what that was. May I ask
12 what's in your luggage there?
13 BILL: It's ... my stuff.
14 LIBERATOR: What kind of stuff — if you don't mind my
15 asking?
16 BILL: It's just stuff from my life.
17 LIBERATOR: Like ... ?
18 BILL: *(Exasperated)* Look, why are you so nosy? You're asking
19 a lot of questions and you're making me very
20 uncomfortable. I've got stuff here, it's in my bag, and
21 I'm carrying it to that mountain in the East. What's so
22 hard to understand?
23 LIBERATOR: *(Remaining very calm, with a caring tone in his*
24 *voice)* I'm just ... curious. And I care.
25 BILL: Care? How can you care? You don't even know me.
26 LIBERATOR: Well, it may seem that way. But I truly do care.
27 And maybe I can help.
28 BILL: I doubt it — nobody else has. *(Pauses, thinking.)* All
29 right, if you must know what's in here, it's full of my
30 junk. All the debris of my life — or at least part of it.
31 There's a mess of residue from my broken marriage, a
32 stack of shoeboxes full of my failure, and ... a whole lot
33 of bad memories. And this isn't even all of it — there's a
34 lot more back home.
35 LIBERATOR: So you'll be back this way again?

1 BILL: Oh yeah, I'm guessing there'll be many trips. Look,
2 I've got a lot of junk so it will take a lot of trips. When
3 you've been where I've been and stepped in it like I
4 have, there's a lot of road to cover.

5 LIBERATOR: That bad?

6 BILL: Oh, only if you consider a failed relationship, an
7 alienated kid, embezzlement, no friends, and all the
8 guilt that goes with it bad.

9 LIBERATOR: So, why carry it in a big bag all the way up
10 that mountain?

11 BILL: Because that's what the man said to do.

12 LIBERATOR: Uh, what man?

13 BILL: That man over at the corner church.

14 LIBERATOR: A minister told you to do this?

15 BILL: I guess he was a minister — he had a white collar and
16 carried a big black book.

17 LIBERATOR: (*Shakes his head and speaks quietly to himself.*)
18 When will these churches learn?

19 BILL: I beg your pardon?

20 LIBERATOR: Oh, nothing. Listen, Bill, I need to tell you
21 something.

22 BILL: (*A surprised look on his face*) You called me Bill.

23 LIBERATOR: Yes, that's your name.

24 BILL: But I never told you my name.

25 LIBERATOR: No, I guess you didn't. Well, there's a lot about
26 you I know.

27 BILL: But how? We've never met before.

28 LIBERATOR: That's not the important thing here, Bill. What
29 I need to tell you is important. (*Reaches out his hand.*) I'd
30 like you to give me your bag.

31 BILL: (*Pulls the bag close.*) Why? It's *my* stuff — I'll deal with it.

32 LIBERATOR: But you're dealing with it in a very difficult
33 and useless way.

34 BILL: But it's what the man said to do — he said it was the
35 only way I'd get some peace back in my life.

- 1 LIBERATOR: What you're doing, Bill, will ensure you'll
2 never find peace. I want to take this off of your hands.
- 3 BILL: (*Getting animated*) But it's *my* bag — my junk — my life —
4 my mess. If I don't take care of it and carry it up that
5 mountain, it'll weigh me down forever.
- 6 LIBERATOR: No, Bill, if *I* don't take it, it will weigh you
7 down forever.
- 8 BILL: But you don't know what's in here. You don't have a
9 clue how rotten this load is. (*His voice becomes very shaky*
10 *as he starts to break down. He falls to his knees.*) Nobody has
11 a clue. Nobody knows ... (*His voice trails off.*)
- 12 LIBERATOR: (*With great compassion in his voice*) Knows what,
13 Bill? About your kid brother?
- 14 BILL: (*Sobbing*) How do you know about that?
- 15 LIBERATOR: I told you, Bill, I know all about you. I saw
16 what happened that night.
- 17 BILL: (*Shocked*) You were there?
- 18 LIBERATOR: In a manner of speaking, yes. I know you had
19 too much to drink before that accident. I know your
20 brother asked to drive and you wouldn't let him. And I
21 know that guilt consumes you every day of your life.
- 22 BILL: (*Pauses, still sobbing*) But ... that's why I have to dump
23 this ... (*He points to Stage Left*) up there.
- 24 LIBERATOR: (*He kneels down and puts his hand on BILL's*
25 *shoulder.*) But it won't help, Bill. There will always be
26 more — more guilt, more pain, more ruined
27 relationships, more ... stuff. You've got to give it up.
- 28 BILL: But *I* made the mess — don't *I* have to do something
29 about it?
- 30 LIBERATOR: You can't — that's why I'm here.
- 31 BILL: What will you do with it?
- 32 LIBERATOR: Trust me. I'll carry it far away. But I can't *take*
33 it from you — you have to give it to me. It's your choice.
- 34 BILL: It doesn't make sense. I created all this. Shouldn't I
35 have to dig my way out? No other man can do that for me.

1 **LIBERATOR:** You're right — but I can.

2 **BILL:** *(He slowly stands and starts to lift the bag.)* It's very heavy.

3 It can't be fair that you carry it and not me.

4 **LIBERATOR:** It's OK — it's what I do.

5 **BILL:** Are you sure you can carry it by yourself? It's a big hill.

6 **LIBERATOR:** I'm not going up *that* hill.

7 **BILL:** *(He stares at the bag, then looks inside for a moment. He then*
8 *quickly closes it and thrusts it at the LIBERATOR.)* Take it! I

9 can't do this anymore. *(The LIBERATOR takes the bag as*

10 *BILL falls to his knees, sobbing again. The LIBERATOR*

11 *throws the bag over his shoulder and stumbles beneath the*

12 *weight. He then begins silently walking with the bag toward the*

13 *edge of Stage Right, the opposite direction from where BILL*

14 *was headed. After a few seconds, BILL looks up and calls out*

15 *in a weak voice.)* But what do I do now?

16 **LIBERATOR:** *(Calls back in a strained voice.)* Start living — free.

17 **BILL:** But I don't know how.

18 **LIBERATOR:** Start by going back to that church and asking

19 to borrow that big black book. You'll find what you need

20 inside of it. Read it. Believe what you read. Have faith.

21 You will be forgiven and you will find the freedom you

22 have been seeking. *(A spotlight slowly illuminates a cross at*

23 *one side of the altar. BILL kneels in front of it.)*

24 **OFF-STAGE VOICE:** "Come to me, all of you who are weary

25 and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest ...

26 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares

27 about what happens to you" (Matthew 11:28, 1 Peter 5:7).

28

29 **HYMN:** "Be Still, My Soul"

30 1. Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.

31 Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.

32 Leave to your God to order and provide;

33 In every change, He faithful will remain.

34 Be still, my soul: your best, your heavenly Friend

35 Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

1 2. Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
 2 To guide the future, as He has the past.
 3 Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
 4 All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
 5 Be still, my soul: the waves and winds shall know
 6 His voice Who ruled them while He dwelt below.

7
 8 3. Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on
 9 When we shall be forever with the Lord.
 10 When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,
 11 Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
 12 Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past
 13 All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

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NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the left margin of each page of dialog are for the convenience of the director. With these, he/she may easily direct attention to a specific passage.



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