

# Speak out!



“Carry each other’s burdens  
& in this way you will fulfill  
the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6:2

**F**ew passages in Scripture have gripped me so piercingly in recent years as these words in Paul's letter to the Galatians: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Paul's call to mutual burden-bearing speaks powerfully of how our lives are not our own, but are lived both *with* and *for* others because of Jesus. It is this grace-based call to become a new sort of disciple community which made the early church's witness so shocking and powerful.

If we could forget our chapter and verse divisions momentarily, we might more readily see that this exhortation from Paul arises immediately after his parallel warning about giving in to sinful urges, and his encouragement to "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25) so that we might bear the fruit of the Spirit. One of the most practical ways we keep in step with the Holy Spirit is by walking with one another, particularly in areas of burden or challenge.

As we continue our journey of Lent, we may remember how Jesus offered a new command to His disciples while gathered in the upper room: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Called to Christ, we are also called to one another. Loved by Christ, we are likewise called to love one another. And it is by living in this way that our witness is strongest to the world around us, particularly when division and hatred seem so pervasive.

That teaching of Jesus in the upper room comes shortly *before* He goes to the Cross on our behalf, exemplifying self-giving love and burden-bearing. That teaching also arises just *after* Jesus washed His disciples' dirty feet, something we mark on Maundy Thursday during Holy Week. Jesus' humble ministry amongst the dust and mud-caked feet of His disciples reminds us that real love gets dirty. Real love is not all fresh flowers and sweet chocolate. Real love steps onto the rough-hewn roads we walk and puts on the wearisome weights we carry.

All through this issue of *Speak Out!* we explore what it looks like to love selflessly and bear one another's burdens. May we be encouraged and challenged to continue that grace-based call to real discipleship.



Matt Erickson  
Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church



Adriana Hayes' artwork is personal and purposeful. Read our interview with Adriana on page 5 and check out more of her artwork on Instagram at @madebyadri.

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## Speak Out! Team:

Matt Erickson, Senior Pastor  
Rachel Shuster, Editor &  
Photographer  
Liz Carver, Designer  
Mari Diaz, Proofreader  
Sheila Goehring, Writer  
Adriana Hayes, Editorial Assistance  
Lisa Sinclair, Writer  
Anneke Theis, Editorial Assistance

# Carry One Another's Burdens

One of the beautiful things about the fellowship that God surrounds us with is that we are never alone. Even along His journey to the Cross—something we remember during this season of Lent—Jesus found help from others, including Simon of Cyrene who shouldered the Cross for a time along the route (Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26). There are times when each of us is tired, overwhelmed, and trodden down by life, and we need each other to get through. We are reminded of this gift and prompted to lean into the encouragement of others in Galatians 6:2: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." As seekers of the good life, whose "delight is in the law of the Lord," (Psalm 1:2) we are called to bear the weight of whatever our friends, family, and fellow believers are going through. We hope that this issue of *Speak Out!* encourages, reminds, and inspires you to carry each other's burdens.



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OFFICE HOURS Monday-Friday, 8 am-4 pm  
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# STORY: Lisa Sinclair

Growing up without a mother or father is like the vine or the tree that withers without water or nourishment: it makes you vulnerable to mistrust and low self-esteem, to a lack of structure and sense of competence. It opens you up to false and wrong sources for rooting and growth—and to "lookin' for love in all the wrong places."

By the time I was 14, my parents had divorced, I'd been taken away from my mother, and my father had died. I experienced additional pain—physical and sexual abuse, and my brother was critically injured with a homemade gun. I was desperate for meaning and love, always believing that I would die young from heartbreak. By 25, I myself was a divorced single parent and an abusive mother who'd had an abortion and had attempted suicide. Although I had heard and believed that God loved me and that Jesus died for me and wanted to live in me, I was still so full of unhealed brokenness and crookedness.

**EVERY NIGHT, I WOULD HOLD MY ARM UP TO THE CEILING, BELIEVING THAT IF I COULD FALL ASLEEP WITHOUT LETTING IT DOWN, GOD WOULD LIFT ME OUT OF MY PAIN.**

Then I, the "foremost sinner" of mamas, discovered I was pregnant again. I had recently become part of a Bible-believing church and discovered that Scripture was living: God was speaking to me through His written word! It mattered what I did—only God could straighten me and integrate my shattered self.

Five months pregnant, I sat in church listening to a perfect-looking pastor preach on Psalm 51 about David's adulterous sin with Bathsheba and subsequent disastrous cover-up and pain. This preacher started the service by singing with his perfect-looking wife and perfect-looking children. I was furious. I thought, "It's fine for you to preach that stuff with your perfect little family, but what if you were sitting here in my place and had done the things I've done?" I was so angry and ready to run out the back of the church, but somehow found myself running up to the front!



Above: Paul and Lisa; Inset: Lisa & her daughter reunite

My story poured out. The pastor told me that God loved me and forgave me, that my baby was not sin but a gift from God and needed to know my love. We prayed together, but I went home not feeling any different. As I lay in bed that night, I asked God yet again for forgiveness. Suddenly, it seemed that the ceiling of my room opened—I could see blue sky and billowing clouds, and hear holy and delighted laughter. I don't know how, but I knew I was clean, pure, accepted, and loved.

With pastoral counseling, I placed my daughter for adoption with a Christian agency. When she was 18, we would be able to connect with each other. I awaited that time joyfully and prayerfully.

Over the years, God gave me a new family. He healed and shaped me through the loving care and correction of the church community.

**SLOWLY, AND THROUGH TRIAL AND ERROR, GOD REVEALED GIFTS HE HAD GIVEN TO ME. HE STARTED TO USE ME—EVEN ME.**

My husband Paul and I were married and had two more children. He adopted my oldest child. We went to seminary, became missionaries in West Africa, and later served in the pastorate of several Brook churches, and worked for healing in the city of Milwaukee. We have been a part of Eastbrook for the past ten years, where Paul served as missions pastor and I am on the Church Council. You might think to yourself, "Wow, who let her in?"

And you would be right because I have never been deserving, but our gracious God loves to use foolish, despised, and broken things.

All across these years, I have prayed for my daughter and tried to find and connect with her. I thought that perhaps she had died or was so disabled that she couldn't communicate with me. As I entered my 70s and suffered more chronic illness, I realized that perhaps I had misunderstood God. Once again, I surrendered my daughter into God's faithfulness.

Last April, after her 46th birthday, my daughter found me and we met. She told me that she loves Jesus and never doubted that she was loved. She was nurtured in a loving home that I couldn't have given her. She was married to a pastor, had four believing children, and was involved in missions to orphan and marginalized children in a needy part of the world. How could all of this be?

**THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME, BEYOND ANYTHING I COULD ASK OR IMAGINE, "EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANTLY." HE HAS LAVISHED HIS LOVE ON ME.**

Now, when I raise my arms in church or at home on my bed, it is in gratitude that God has seen and taken my hand. He will take me home one day: beloved, belonging, rich, and full of days. ■



# Hymns for the Homebound

by Sheila Goehring

COVID-19, a blessing in disguise? Is that possible? Maybe blessing isn't the right word; regardless, positive things have happened in the life of Eastbrook Church that may not have commenced apart from the pandemic. One such positive result has been the formation of a small group of singers that visits with homebound members of our church family.

As Senior Director for Congregational Care, Pastor Ruth Carver keeps regular contact with members who, while appreciating the live-streaming of worship (another pandemic-born ministry), wanted to see, visit with, and still feel a part of their church community. So, in October 2020, Pastor Ruth sent out an open invitation for anyone who might be interested in singing some hymns and taking a little bit of Eastbrook to these people. Initially, eight of us responded, and a new outreach ministry began.

Our first outing took place on January 10, 2021, to four different residences. Still in the

midst of the pandemic, these initial visits took place outside the windows or doors of our dear friends. Even in Wisconsin's wintry weather, it was wonderful! We prayed together and harmonized a capella to sing various hymns.

Within six months, as things began to return to "normal," we were able to enter each person's residence, with masks on, of course. Reopening also meant our desire to add to this ministry by sharing communion with these church family members became a reality.

Fast forward three years, to present day. This small ensemble of eight to 15 singers has been privileged to visit with these Eastbrook family members at 45 different stops over 18 ministry outings. We sing, we pray, we share communion and hugs, laughter, tears, faith stories, and miracles with one another.

Each visit varies a bit, but generally starts with the group members introducing themselves. Pastor Ruth then shares about

the significance of communion, and the group sings "Let Us Break Bread Together." Scripture is read, the elements shared, general prayers of praise and thanksgiving are offered. The group sings two or three more hymns or carols, always including "It Is Well with My Soul." We end by praying for the person or people we're visiting, especially lifting up any specific needs or requests shared.

We have visited people in a variety of residential settings—individual homes and apartments, nursing homes, senior living centers with varying levels of care—from the heart of the city of Milwaukee, to surrounding communities, to the suburbs as wide as Waukesha, Pewaukee, and Oconomowoc. There have been visits to individuals, a couple or family, even a room filled with friends and fellow residents of the Eastbrook member, who invited them to share this faith moment.

Each visit has been unique and yet also



shares a sameness in serving as the hands and feet of Christ to bring this small piece of Eastbrook to these precious homebound members. And, as many times as we've gone out, and as many people as we have ministered to, we always come away feeling that we were blessed.

One of the greatest blessings has been to visit with some individuals who were terminally ill. Group member Jerry Pickett reflected that, "being able to share a blessing, communion, worship and prayer is an honor for us, knowing that you will be one of the few to bless them this side of glory. But the blessing is also for us because we have the privilege of our brother or sister to lead the way for us."

Those times have provided an opportunity to "Sing Me to Heaven." We have then been privileged to sing at some homegoing celebrations, as well.

Each person, each visit is special. And each has its own story that could be shared. But

one of our first visits, before we brought communion, will stay with me forever. We saw Dr. David Moberg, at the time 99 years young, on an early June day meeting outside at Luther Manor. After doing our usual singing and praying, there was some small talk, and the hymn "Children of the Heavenly Father" was mentioned. Dr. Moberg then began singing the hymn to us in Swedish, the original language of the hymn and the heart language of his emigrant parents. What a gift we received that day!

I am forever grateful for this ministry opportunity that has allowed me, allowed us—and God willing will continue—to connect or reconnect with some of our at-home Eastbrook brothers and sisters. To God be the glory! ■

**In addition to ministering to our homebound community members, Sheila Goehring is a member of Eastbrook's Worship Choir. To learn more about the various groups and opportunities to lead our community through music, arts, and prayer, visit [eastbrook.org/worship-prayer](http://eastbrook.org/worship-prayer).**

# It Is Well with My Soul

This hymn was written in 1873 after traumatic events in the hymnist Horatio Spafford's own life. Not only did Spafford experience financial ruin from the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, but all four of his daughters tragically died aboard a ship destined for England to participate in D.L. Moody's evangelistic efforts in 1873. His wife Anna survived and sent him a telegram which only said "Saved alone..." Spafford wrote this now-famous hymn as a way to process his grief.

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrow like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,  
"It is well, it is well with my soul!"*

*(Refrain):  
It is well with my soul!  
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials  
should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—  
My sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be  
sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall  
descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul!*

Scan the QR code to hear an audio recording of our Hymns for the Homebound ministry team singing "It Is Well with My Soul" on one of their visits last month.





## GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOKER: Adriana Hayes

The weight of our individual burdens may vary, as does the visibility. Some of us experience immeasurable pain in silence, whereas others choose to turn up the volume amidst their suffering, to show others they are not alone and build strength through community. Adriana Hayes is a faithful believer whose relationships with God and others have strengthened her spirit amidst a number of lifelong physical challenges; she has used her voice—and her artistic talents, pictured throughout this piece and on the cover—to draw awareness to not only the circumstances we face, but the fortitude we build through witness to others. Let's help make our big church feel a bit smaller as we get to know Adriana.

### Tell us a bit about yourself!

My husband Chris and I have been in Wisconsin for almost 18 years. We have three daughters, along with our chi-weenie, Brie (91 in dog years). In 2017, Chris, Promise (now 15) and I became a licensed foster family, and after five years of being able to love Aalysah (11) and Neriah (6.5) while in foster care, we adopted them both in 2022. We live in Whitefish Bay and I'm an artist with my degree in Fashion Design. Art is flexible, so I'm able to do freelance work and teach as an adjunct professor at Mount Mary University's Fashion Design Program, in addition to my primary role at home. I also find joy in writing and speaking about God's redeeming power of pain and suffering in my life.

### What is your connection to Eastbrook Church?

We first heard about Eastbrook through a series of events that led us back to Milwaukee. In January of 2020, we lost a jury trial for Termination of Parental Rights, and we were devastated to learn that it would take another two-plus years to get to another trial. Shortly after that, along with the rest of the world, were thrown into an even greater tailspin when COVID-19 hit. We had been in a small group at our old church that naturally dissolved. If there was a rock bottom, I was pretty sure we had hit it. The Holy Spirit made it clear that we were to move back into Milwaukee County.

We ended up in a house seven minutes away from Eastbrook and began attending virtually; immediately, we knew we had found a special community that was diverse in race, age, nationality, and economic status, but unified through the gospel and love of Jesus Christ.

We joined Eastbrook's Foster and Adoption Support Team (FAST), through which we met blended families who looked similar to ours and came alongside us and prayed for us. Our daughters are involved in the youth ministries, and we have joined a small group with four other families. Chris has attended the Eastbrook Men's retreat and faithfully gets our girls to the 9:30 am service on Sundays; I had the opportunity to serve on the Middle School team on Wednesday nights, and also ran a small Fashion Design Camp for VBS last summer.

### Describe your walk with God. You have experienced different physical, mental, and emotional pain. How have you approached God—and how has He shown Himself to you—in those moments of your life?

I was born with Spina Bifida, which is a failure of the spinal column to form completely in the first six weeks of pregnancy. I've had 25 surgeries in my 39 years of life; my first spine surgery was at six months old.

When I was eight years old, I began experiencing kidney infections and tightness in my lower back and legs. An MRI revealed that my spinal cord had re-tethered to the scar tissue from my first spine surgery. I still had quite a bit of growing to do, so another spine surgery was needed to preserve function of my legs and prevent paralysis. This surgery resulted in several complications: three more spine surgeries, two years in and out of the hospital, a Staph Infection, and improper healing for my Dura, the muscle sac that holds Cerebral Spinal Fluid (CSF) and your spine and brain float in, which meant that CSF began

leaking out of my incision and causing severe headaches. At one point, I was put on flat bed rest on my back for an entire month, in hopes that a CSF leak under my skin would heal on its own; it was unsuccessful, and a shunt was eventually placed to drain spinal fluid from where it was building up.

It was in the midst of all of this that I realized the significance of the physical pain Jesus endured on the Cross. He became the only person I could talk to who truly understood my pain. I remember clearly telling God that if He was going to allow me to live, He needed to use my pain for something good or else it wasn't worth it.

All of these spinal surgeries also caused permanent nerve damage, loss of bladder and bowel function, and severe constipation that grew to have such a negative impact on my health and quality of life that at age 32, I had three surgeries to help my body function. I also developed severe drop-foot; I did not have the strength to pull my foot up when I walked. This launched me into intense physical therapy for two years, during which I was placed in leg braces, and eventually I began a series of 13 leg and foot surgeries involving multiple tendon transfers, reshaping bones, removing pressure sore infections, and Achilles tendon lengthening, to name a few.

These surgeries took me through middle and high school and into college, and resulted in severe disfigurement in my legs and feet as well as total loss of sensation and movement in my feet. My feet now function similarly to a severe diabetic foot; my walking depends heavily on the use of leg braces and a cane for balance. During college, I began experiencing numbness in my legs again and went back in for my sixth spine surgery to remove a fist-sized tumor.

Fast forward to 2006: I graduated, got married, and moved to Wisconsin. In 2008, I gave birth to Promise via high-risk C-section. There was a chance that Promise could be born with Spina Bifida, but we chose to cover my pregnancy in prayer with faith that God, who had been faithful in His promises to me, would continue that. We named her based on Psalm 145:13, *"The LORD is trustworthy in all He promises and faithful in all He does."*

In 2012, I had another spine surgery done to relieve tension on my spinal cord. At that point, untethering the spine at its original location (L5) would have most likely caused paralysis; as an alternative, an approximate 1" section of spine and ribs were removed from my thoracic spine and then I was fused back together; in short, they cut my torso in half and shortened me by about an inch. It was, by far, the most difficult surgery I have undergone.

Over these years, I quickly became accustomed to physical pain, but I was not sure how to process emotional pain. In high school, I turned to cutting in an attempt to numb everything I was feeling. It was easier for me to transfer the emotional pain I felt into physical pain which I could identify the source and then quickly provide relief from.

With continued biblical counseling and psychiatric care over the past 10 years, God has been loving and gracious in bringing me

to an understanding that cutting is an addiction just like drugs, alcohol, food, gambling and so many other things, but no addiction can fully heal deep wounds like the power of the Holy Spirit. Addiction robs; the Holy Spirit restores.

**What prayers or words of hope can you share with those who may be struggling with similar pain in their own lives right now?**

I could say a lot here, but to boil it down: learn to worship through lament.

I took a theology course through Eastbrook, and my professor had us write our own lament as we studied the book of Psalms. It was thought-changing for me on many levels. For years, I had struggled with the balance of being honest with those around me about my pain while at the same time not wanting to seem like I was constantly complaining. Those who live in chronic pain will be familiar with this challenge; each day the pain is different and so each day my need for help is different, so I need to talk about it.

Lament was the answer I had been looking for! It provides a rhythm for me where I can lay my raw emotions before the feet of Jesus, while in faith, finishing with what I know (not feel) to be true about God. Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 9:24 tell us that Jesus is actively sitting at the right hand of God and interceding and advocating for the things we lay at His feet. Through the Holy Spirit, God returns our words of lament to us but transforms them into fruit. Lament gives us something productive to do with the emotions that, left to our sinful nature, we would sin out of. Lament allows us to reflect Jesus in the face of our constant pain.

**As the theme of this issue is "Carry Each Other's Burdens," do you have advice for others who may be walking alongside those coping with chronic pain? What can we do to help carry our loved ones' burdens?**

One of the most helpful questions you can ask is "What do you need today?" because the answer changes daily and the pain isn't always apparent. There are days where I feel relatively good and I want to take advantage of that and do things for myself, and then there are days where I need help just getting out of bed. Communication is key.

Also, let them help carry your burdens and share your needs if asked. Many times this can help counteract feelings of being a burden. Pain creates forced rest which allows a great opportunity to pray for others who are shouldering heavy things. ■

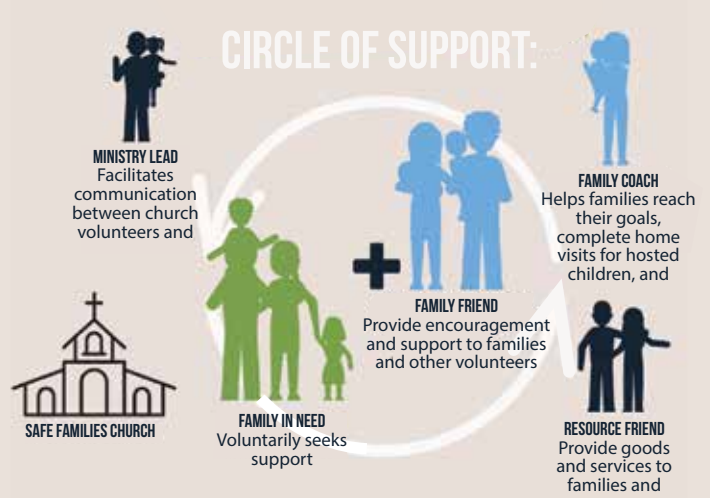




# RELIEF THROUGH RELATIONSHIP:

## A Focus on Safe Families

by Rachel Shuster



Growth and nourishment are aided by connection. Psalm 1 reminds us that we can experience growth in God through regular connection to His Word and time meditating on His law, *“like a tree planted by streams of water”* (Psalm 1:3).

Likewise, social connection provides a key ingredient to nurturing a healthy family. God has transformed the lives of families in crisis through a vital, church-based ministry supported right here at Eastbrook.

Safe Families for Children is a national nonprofit that aims to stabilize families and keep them together. The organization provides services and support to families who retain custody of their children, to help keep them out of the child welfare system; if Child Protective Services is involved with a household, Safe Families cannot be.

That **FAMILY IN NEED** may be experiencing any number of situations leading to social isolation, including housing issues, job insecurity, mental health struggles, substance abuse, or single parenthood. Many find out about Safe Families through word of mouth—a referral from a friend, social worker, or even a social support organization like Milwaukee’s Sojourner House or Children’s Hospital—and contact the organization to connect them with a network of support.

Anneke Theis is Eastbrook’s **MINISTRY LEAD** for Safe Families, a liaison of sorts between the organization and our church. She says Eastbrook is uniquely situated and positioned to serve in this way. “A huge part of why Safe Families as an organization is partnering with Eastbrook is because of our location in Milwaukee and connection to the city!” she says. Our location in the city has the potential to provide care for families that are currently not able to receive the care they need. The waiting list is long, and Eastbrook can help.

Theis and her husband got involved with Safe Families five years ago as a host family who provided respite care. Kids came into their home for a few weeks or months before rejoining their families, but Theis says hosting alone simply gave parents a chance to take a breath, rather than providing lasting relationships that helped their family to find healing and wholistic support.

Now, a few years later, Safe Families has tweaked its model to fuel social support through hospitality, compassion, and generosity.

In-home hosting can be an element of support, but it’s not the primary focus any longer.

“The goal is relationship, friendship, and support,” Theis explains. “It’s not just to give you respite, but to get you out of social isolation and provide you with someone to talk to and lean on.”

Safe Families operates using a model called the “Circle of Support.” (see diagram above). Volunteers are trained to walk alongside a family in need in one of three roles:

- **FAMILY FRIENDS** provide support to the Family in Need. This can look different depending on the situation, but primarily focuses on friendship and social connection. Down the road, this relationship could also potentially incorporate in-home hosting for children while parents get back on their feet.
- **FAMILY COACHES** connect the Family in Need to any resources that may help them reach their goals, as well as supporting volunteers while in service.
- **RESOURCE FRIENDS** donate goods (diapers, meals) and provide services (prayer, carpooling) as wraparound support for their team.

This “community of care” is a true team effort, benefiting all involved.

Right now, the amount of families in need around Milwaukee exceeds the available volunteer pool. The good news: anybody can step up to help! Given the sensitivity of certain family situations, volunteers do need to pass a background check and sign a confidentiality agreement. Safe Families provides all of the necessary training, around four hours taking place at one of various area churches who host sessions throughout the year.

Beyond those safety and security requirements, the primary qualification to get involved is a desire to support a parent who needs help.

“Sometimes missional opportunities through Eastbrook can feel big and overwhelming,” says Theis, “but it can also be a beautiful thing. The ask is simple: can you be a friend? Out of that flows everything else.” ■

Are you interested to learn more about how you could partner with a family in need of support? Contact Anneke Theis, [anneketheis07@gmail.com](mailto:anneketheis07@gmail.com), to discuss your options and take your next step with Safe Families.