

Sharing The Burden

The Barry-Wehmiller Story

After the economic downturn in 2008, a company named Barry-Wehmiller had suddenly lost 40% of new equipment orders and faced major financial distress. Normally, companies who face this issue implement the same solution: layoffs. However, CEO Bob Chapman and his team believed it was better to maintain and strengthen their company culture.

So, they formulated a furlough program that required everyone in the company to take four weeks of unpaid time off. They could use it whenever they wanted, and they didn't have to use it in consecutive days or weeks. This satisfied the entire company and, as the economy improved, everyone kept their jobs, the company saved \$20 million, recorded three successive record years, and most importantly, morale greatly increased.

What mattered most was how Bob communicated this program to the people. He said, *"It's better that we should all suffer a little than any of us should have to suffer a lot."* Not only did this spark the company to share the burden, but leadership also noticed team members were willing to take more time off to aid those who could not afford it, despite never being asked to. Overall, each member of Barry-Wehmiller was touched that they worked for a company who genuinely cared about them.

This story reminds me of how God has treated us with this same care. Because of our disobedience over thousands of years, He has had every reason to destroy the world and send us to Hell, but He hasn't. Instead, He has stood by His vision of the world He created where, *"He would be our God, and we would be His people"* (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). He desired this vision so much that He was willing to sacrifice His own Son, Jesus Christ, to pay for our iniquities. In other words, He determined it was better that He should suffer a little, rather than any of us should have to suffer a lot.

This story also shows how leadership sets the tone for how the culture is. 1 John 4:19 reads, *"We love because he first loved us"*. When Barry-Wehmiller's leadership chose their people over profits, the rest of the company, out of gratitude, were willing to do the same for each other. In the same way, because of what Jesus did, the early church, also out of gratitude, created a culture of making sacrifices for each other, *"as each one had need"* (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35). Good leadership creates good community. Where there is good community, there is trust. Where there is trust, there is loyalty. Where there is loyalty, there is a willingness to suffer and sacrifice.

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." – Galatians 6:2