

The wound in his shoulder

By [Beth Merrill Neel](#)

March 31, 2015

*"It is related in the annals of Clairvaux that St. Bernard asked our Lord which was His greatest unrecorded suffering, and Our Lord answered, 'I had on My Shoulder, which I bore My Cross on the Way of Sorrows, a grievous Wound, which was more painful than the others, and which is not recorded by men. Honor this wound with thy devotion.'"*

I have been thinking about the wounds people carry, those unbearable weights that take their toll on our bodies and hearts. I think of the old but not elderly woman who complained for months to her doctor about a cough, and when he finally got around to taking her seriously, discovered that cancer had taken over. She was told she has only weeks to live. It is a wound of not having been taken seriously, as if facing death were not wound enough.

I think of the acquaintance whose young nephew has leukemia, his wearing those large, dark-ringed eyes and bald head of children living with chemo and cancer, her bearing worry and hope at the same time, the soul-vertigo that causes.

I think of that parent in Nigeria, those last shards of hope disintegrating, living in fear of Boko Haram and knowing that rage will only cause more trouble.

I think about the invisible responsibilities people choose to bear—the responsibility of caring for a brother who is mentally ill and a hoarder, who could at any moment be thrown out into the streets. The young mom, a professional in a high-profile position, diagnosed with breast cancer and having to be the gracious face of positivism and faith when maybe, inside, there is terror and an absence of God. The many who have put their hope and trust in the church only to have that trust broken in ways they believe can never, ever be mended.

People carry so much. It takes a toll.

There's the other weight, too—the weight of not being able to do one damn thing about the suffering. It's a secondary weight that is as heavy as the primary one, maybe: the weight of being left behind, alone; the weight of being powerless; the weight of not having stopped some part of the tear in the fabric of the world.

Our Roman Catholic friends have a novena about the shoulder wound of Christ—the wound caused by the weight of the cross he was forced to carry. My shoulders ache at the thought of that.

It's where our tension finds a home—the shoulders, the neck, the hardening of the occipital ridge. It's the pinch between the shoulder blades where those invisible weights claw dully at us, reminding us of our responsibility, of our need to carry some of this, of our need to own some of this.

Where is the relief? Surely letting go of the burden lessens it some, but there is perpetual tension in those muscles. Massage, heat, stretching, meditation: a relief, yes. But a cure?

Perhaps we are never truly unburdened, at least not on this side of the grave.

*Originally posted at [Hold Fast to What Is Good](#)*