

**Carrying the extra burden****971017**

When I was growing up, hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains seemed to be ultimate outdoor experience. But I never got to go until I was grown. The very first time I was ever able to go on such a trip two other men who had been several times before. This was a team effort, and it I decided that I would take all of the food and let the others take the tent and other shared equipment. My logic here was that although the pack would be heavier at the start, by the end of the trip it would be much lighter due to all of the food we would eat. And so I assembled together the great mass of food we would need, not the least of which was two one-pound squeeze bottles of butter. I had never even heard of squeeze butter before, but I was assured by my cohorts that it would be used.

I started the trip with about 50 pounds in the pack on my back. At the end of the first day we had descended about 2000 feet from Clingman's dome as we hiked towards our final destination of Fontana Dam. My companions skipped merrily towards our first campsite, while I gritted my teeth and struggled to put one foot in front of another. I concentrated on repeating this while I tried to block out the pain. Finally I got to the campsite where the other fellows were resting.

The next morning I was stiff and sore, but the pack was indeed a little lighter and the trail was much easier to travel. But as we ground out the mileage from one camp to another I began to have serious questions about whether we were ever going to use any of that liquid butter. Finally we cooked the hash brown potatoes. You cannot imagine the glee that I felt when I poured two tablespoons into the frying pan. But alas, that was the very last time that there was a call for it.

My friends, in the meantime, had become somewhat homesick and decided to cut the trip short a day. Naturally, we would not be eating the food that had been on the menu for the last day. There wasn't much for me to do except to just go along. I emerged from the trail a tired but better man for the experience. I also had lots of food and almost two pounds of butter.

Later I began to think about that accursed butter. They might have well put a big rock in my pack. Come to think of it, I think they did that, too! But carrying that butter had eventually become a matter of pride and principle. I would just think to myself, "Dang that butter!" and shoulder the pack and move on out. It dawned on me that many situations in life were like that burden, it was just something that you have to carry on through, even though it doesn't make any sense at all. It is like so much of the paperwork that we do at the office. It is like the people that we encounter that will never change. They are just there and you have to resign yourselves to it. You are forced to deal with it no matter what.

And you can curse it and concentrate on it, but that won't make it go away or even decrease in weight a single ounce. You reach another plateau of strength when you decide to carry it no matter what. There are some weights in life that you just can't lay aside, but there is someone who will help you carry them. Jesus' said that his yoke was easy and his burden light, and it means that he helps us with the other burdens of life as well.

Hey, next time you go camping with friends, see who you can get to carry the butter!

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