

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

June 29, 2025

Overcoming Loneliness
“Burden Bearers”
Galatians 6:1-3
Rev. Mike Fordham

Some years ago, Mr. Alter’s fifth-grade class at Lake Elementary School in Oceanside, California, included 14 boys who had no hair. Only one, however, had no choice in the matter. Ian O’Gorman, undergoing chemotherapy for lymphoma, faced the prospect of having his hair fall out in clumps. So he had his head shaved. But then 13 of his classmates shaved their heads, so Ian wouldn’t feel out of place. Eleven-year-old Scott Sebelius in an Associated Press story about the class said, “If everybody has his head shaved, sometimes people don’t know who’s who. They don’t know who has cancer, and who just shaved their head.” Ten-year-old Kyle Hanslik started it all. He talked to some other boys, and before long they all trekked to the barber shop. Kyle said, “The last thing he would want is to not fit in. We just wanted to make him feel better.” Ian’s father, Shawn, choked back tears as he talked about what the boys had done. He said simply, “It’s hard to put words to.” The boys in this classroom are a great example of what God intends the church to look and act like as a burden bearing community. The Bible teaches that God calls on His church to be a community of His people who humbly, gently, carry each other burdens.

Galatians 6:1-3

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. ² Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. ³ If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

HUMBLE COMMUNITY

The Apostle Paul first teaches that God’s design for a healthy church is to be a **Humble Community**. Paul says if there is a Christian in our church who, for whatever reason, strays off the path of faithfully following Jesus, we are to approach them with the utmost humility as we try to help them back on to the right path. Also, the same principle applies to when we know of a fellow Christian who is struggling with depression, anxiety, overwhelming stress, broken relationships, grief, loneliness, or whatever struggles, we are to approach them with humility. Paul says it is important not to

approach those who have sinned or are hurting as if we are better than them, that we pity them because they are so frail and not as strong as we think we are. Before we approach someone who has strayed or is struggling with loneliness, we are to first check ourselves and not forget we are sinners who stray and that we have our own frailties and struggles. Jesus said in *Matthew 7:3-5*, ³ “*And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? 4 How can you think of saying to your friend, “Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,” when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.*”

Verse 3 adds to the importance of being humble as it says we are not have a holier-than-thou attitude where we look at ourselves as being better than others, especially too good to help others who have gone astray or people who are just feeling a little frail, hurting, lonely, or discouraged. Instead, the Bible tells us in *Romans 12:3*, “*Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.*” We are not to overestimate our own importance but are to have sober judgment of ourselves. We are neither to have an inflated ego or a poor self-image. This keeps us from having a judgmental, critical, holier-than-thou attitude when reaching out to those who are hurting or have strayed from faithfully following Jesus. This requires us to take an honest inventory of our own sinfulness, our own frailties, our own weaknesses.

In truth, most of us are like John Burke, the founding pastor of Gateway Church in Austin, Texas. Pastor John assumed he was not a judgmental person. But just in case he was wrong, he tried an experiment: for one week he kept track of his judgments about other people. He writes honestly in his book, *Mud and the Masterpiece*, what he discovered. He writes, “Judging [others] is *fun!* Judging others makes you feel good, and I’m not sure I’ve gone a single day without this sin. In any given week, I might condemn my son numerous times for a messy room; judge my daughter for being moody—which especially bothers me when I’m being moody (but I have a *good* reason!) even my dog gets the hammer of condemnation for his bad breath Some of you may be thinking, ‘Wait, are you saying that correcting my kids for a messy room is judging?’ NO! But there’s correction that values with mercy and there’s correction that devalues with judgment. I watch the news and condemn those ‘idiotic people’ who do such things. Most reality TV shows are full of people I can judge as sinful, ignorant, stupid, arrogant, or childish. I get in my car and drive and find a host of inept drivers who should have flunked their driving test—and I throw in a little condemnation on our Department of Public Safety for good measure! At the store, I complain to myself about the lack of organization that makes it impossible to find what *I’m* looking for, all the while being tortured with Muzak—who picks that music anyway? I stand in the shortest line, which I judge is way too long because—‘*LOOK PEOPLE—it says “10 items or less,” and I count more than that in three of your baskets—what’s wrong with you people?*’ And why can’t that teenage checker—what *IS* she wearing?—focus and work so we can get out of here? Judging is our favorite pastime, if we’re honest—but we’re not! We’re great at judging the world around us by standards we

would *highly resent* being held to! Judging makes us feel good because it puts us in a better light than others.” Sober judgment is about having a realistic and objective view of ourselves. It’s about acknowledging both our strengths and weaknesses which then empowers us to approach others with a humble attitude.

GENTLE COMMUNITY

The Apostle Paul secondly teaches that God’s design for a healthy church is to be a **Gentle Community**. When we are humble and have a sober judgment of ourselves, we are then equipped to approach others who are down-and-out with gentleness. Paul says we are to restore someone who is struggling with all gentleness and humility. The Greek word used here in *verse 1* for “Restore” is a medical term used for setting a fractured bone. When a doctor sets a person’s broken bone, they use the utmost gentleness to straighten it out. They don’t just jump right in and fix it. They first numb it, then carefully put it back in place, and then secure it so that it has the best chance to heal. When we are helping someone who has strayed away from God, or they are struggling with loneliness and despair, we are to treat them with gentleness, which is the opposite of a harsh and judgmental spirit. A person with a “gentle” spirit is one who is very careful that nothing is said or done that tears someone down but rather builds them up. *Ephesians 4:29* says, *“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”*

To be gentle with someone who has made some bad decisions or someone who is struggling with the challenges of life takes an intentional effort to gently reach out to help them up. Paul also puts humility and gentleness together as essential for a healthy community as he says in *Ephesians 4:1-3*, *“Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.”* It is not easy to be gentle. It takes patience when trying to be gentle with someone who is still grieving when we might think they should be better by now. Patience is very helpful when talking with someone who has made another bad decision which has led to them suffering some bad consequences for their sinful actions. The Greek word for “gentleness” refers to a gentle strength, a godly exercise of power, a lack of harshness. When we are gentle, we have self-control that keeps us from being easily provoked to anger that would lead us to being harsh, judgmental, critical of others, or insensitive to what they are experiencing.

Robert Morgan, in his book, *Worry Less, Live More*, relates a story from the life of John Wooden, one of the most revered coaches in the history of college basketball, who credited much of his success to his dad. He recalled a boyhood occasion when he watched his father deal with a certain situation. His rural Indiana county would pay local farmers to take teams of mules or horses into the gravel pits scattered through the county and haul out loads of gravel. Some pits were deeper than others, and sometimes it was hard for a team to pull a wagon filled with gravel out through the wet sand and up the steep incline. One steamy summer day, wrote Wooden, a young farmer was trying to get his team of horses to pull a fully loaded wagon out of the pit. He was whipping

and cursing those beautiful plow horses, which were frothing at the mouth, stomping, and pulling back from him. The elder Wooden watched for a while, then went over to the young man and said, "Let me take 'em for you." John Wooden then recalled, "Dad started talking to the horses, almost whispering to them, and stroking their noses with a soft touch. Then he walked between them, holding their bridles and bits while he continued talking-very calmly and gently-as they settled down. Gradually he stepped out in front of them and gave a little whistle to start them moving forward while he guided the reins. Within moments, those two big plow horses pulled the wagon out of the gravel pit as easy as could be. As if they were happy to do it." John Wooden said, "I've never forgotten what I saw him do and how he did it. Over the years I've seen a lot of leaders act like that angry young farmer who lost control. ... So much more can usually be accomplished by Dad's calm, confident, and steady approach." Wooden took away an indelible lesson: ***"It takes strength inside to be gentle on the outside."*** A humble, gentle heart empowers us to show the utmost strength when approaching someone who is down-and-out, by treating them with a patient, calm, confident, steady, gentle approach.

LOVING, BURDEN BEARING COMMUNITY

The Apostle Paul teaches that God's design for a healthy church is when it is humble and gentle it then can be a ***Loving, Burden Bearing Community***. Here in *Galatians* 6:2, nestled in between the call to be humble and gentle, Paul says that we are to be a burden bearing community. Paul goes so far as to say that when we bear each other's burdens we are obeying the law of Christ which is found in Jesus' words in *John* 13:34-35, ³⁴ *'So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.'* Jesus' teaching to love each other as Jesus loved them was not a suggestion but was a direct order, a commandment, on the same level of importance as the ten commandments. Jesus also said in *Matthew* 22:37-40, ³⁷ *'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'* ³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* ⁴⁰ *The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.'* When we love God, each other, and ourselves, we are fulfilling all the laws and demands of the entire Old Testament. Paul is saying here in *Galatians* that when we bear each other's burdens we are fulfilling Jesus' command and all the Old Testament laws and commands.

Carrying each other's burdens is to be the norm for how we treat each other in the family of God. The Greek verb for "carry" that Paul uses here is a command and it is in the present tense, meaning that we must continually carry the burdens of others as a way of life. Because we love and care for one another, when we see someone overwhelmed with the burdens of life, without even thinking about it, we automatically come alongside them to help them carry the load that is too heavy for them to carry on their own.

At the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, the world watched as a parable of the father's love was played out on international television. As the gun sounded for the 400-meter race, Great Britain's Derek Redmond knew that his lifelong dream of winning the gold medal was in view. But as he entered the back stretch, Redmond was sent sprawling by the ripping pain of a torn hamstring. By an act of sheer will, he struggled to his feet in excruciating pain and began hopping toward the finish line. Suddenly Derek's father bound out of the stands, past a security guard. He threw his arms around his son. In a voice choked with emotion, he whispered, "Come on, Son, let's finish this together." The crowd cheered and wept as they watched the father half-carrying his wounded son jerkily down the stretch and across the finish line. ***The principle of bearing one another's burden refers to helping other Christians share each other's load whenever temptations oppress us or life depresses us.*** When someone is struggling with the weight of their burdens we then come alongside them, with all gentleness and humility, and support them by selflessly serving them in whatever way will best help them carry their burdens. As M. Scott Peck said, "Often the most loving thing we can do when a friend is in pain is to share the pain--to be there even when we have nothing to offer except our presence and even when being there is painful to ourselves." The greatest example of this kind of loving, burden bearing is found in none other like it is in Jesus. As Jesus said in *John 15:12-13*, "¹² *This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.* ¹³ *There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" Jesus entered our sinful, hurting, broken, dysfunctional, lonely, depressed world and walked with us by laying down His entire life to share the load of life with us. Jesus now invites us to love each other in the same way by laying down our lives for others as loving, burden bearers.

God has blessed us to be a part of His community, called the church. God's design for the church is to be a community of humble, gentle, loving, burden bearers. If you are hurting or need help with the weight of your burdens, tell Jesus and tell another follower of Jesus whom you can trust so they can help you carry the load. This is God's #1 plan for helping us carry the weight of the burdens of life, for us in the church to mutually help each other carry our burdens.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*,* John Piper & Wayne Grudem
- *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Timothy Keller
- *Mud and the Masterpiece*, John Burke
- *Worry Less, Live More*, Robert Morgan

Icebreaker I – When have you experienced someone going out of their way to make you feel included or supported? What impact did it have on you?

Icebreaker II – If you could describe your ideal community in one word, what would it be and why?

1. Galatians 6:1-3 describes a humble and gentle approach to helping others. Why do you think humility is essential when trying to help someone who is struggling or has strayed?
2. The story of Ian and his classmates showed powerful empathy. What can we learn from those boys about what it looks like to "carry each other's burdens"? How might we live that out in our own church or small group?
3. John Burke talked about how judging others can be a "favorite pastime." How can we guard against a judgmental spirit in our daily interactions, especially with those in pain or failure?
4. Paul compares restoring someone to setting a broken bone, with gentleness and care. How can we ensure our words and actions heal rather than harm when helping someone?
5. What does it practically look like to "bear one another's burdens" in today's world? Can you think of a situation where someone quietly bore your burden, or you bore someone else's?
6. Jesus said our love for one another will show the world that we are His disciples. How do humility, gentleness, and shared burdens reflect that love, and what would it take for our church to be more known for those qualities?
7. Derek Redmond's father ran to his son's side and helped him cross the finish line, turning a painful moment into one of love, strength, and compassion. What does this moment teach us about the kind of support we're called to offer others in the body of Christ? When have you experienced, or offered, that kind of burden-bearing presence?
8. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week's sermon to your life?
9. How might this group pray for you this week?