

Engage in Groups
Galatians 6:1-5
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How many of you enjoyed group projects when you were in school? My guess is that if you coasted in your classes (like I did), you liked them because you could get a better grade if you were in a group with some brainiacs. It was pretty cool that we all got the same score even if I didn't contribute much. On the other hand, if you were serious about your studies, you probably didn't like having underperforming teammates like me.

In general, being in a group is good but it can also become grating. About a month ago I listened to a podcast in which the speaker made a statement that I can't get out of my mind. I'm going to change it up slightly and use it as our sermon summary today: *Spiritual growth is a group project.*

Let me explain why I say that. There are almost 60 occurrences of the phrase, "*one another*" in the New Testament that appear as specific commands. Here's the deal – if you're not connected to other Christians, you're going to have a difficult time obeying these commands.

Here are just ten of the "one anothers":

- Love one another (this occurs more than 15 times)
- Be devoted to one another
- Honor one another
- Live in harmony with one another
- Build up one another
- Admonish one another
- Bear with one another
- Comfort one another
- Forgive one another
- Pray for one another (last weekend we focused on praying for revival – I hope you've been doing that this week because when we follow God's plan, we will receive His promises)

Whether we like it or not, we're all involved in the same group project because Romans 12:5 says that we are "***members of one another.***" These commands are impossible to live out if we are not connected with other Christians.

As we continue in our series called *Engage*, let's give our attention to Galatians 6:1-5 by reading the text together: ***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.”***

Before we unpack our text, let's back up to Galatians 5 and set the context. Verse 15 gives us a picture of how these Christians were treating one another: ***“But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”*** Verse 25 provides the key to the Christian life: ***“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”*** Verse 26 indicates that if we want the Body of Edgwood to be strengthened, we must avoid belittling other believers: ***“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*** The word ***“provoke”*** means *“to challenge”* somebody to a contest. Pride can cause us to go after those we consider inferior and to envy those who appear to be superior.

Paul the teacher gives us a four-part group assignment. Let's engage and tackle this together because *spiritual growth is a group project*.

#1: Restore the Broken (1)

God gives us four relational responsibilities in this passage. Our first assignment is found in verse 1: ***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*** One paraphrase puts it this way: *“If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out.”*

Paul refers to his readers as ***“brothers,”*** which indicates we're part of the same family. It's a term that is warm and affectionate and literally means, *“from the same womb.”* The word ***“caught”*** was used to describe a bird or an animal that had become entangled in a trap. A believer who is caught in a sin is one who has been surprised or suddenly entrapped, with no hope of escape. He or she is unexpectedly stuck in sin. ***“Transgression”*** is the idea of stumbling or sliding off a slick path.

When we were missionaries in Mexico, one night we went bowling with our team members. We had a great time, that is, until Beth starting winning. At that point, the fun was over as I stopped smiling and put on my game face. I'll never forget what happened next. I lined up and began my approach. As I got ready to let go of the ball, my fingers got stuck in the holes and I slid face first down the alley! It was a perfect swan dive. I have never seen Beth laugh so hard in her life. I defaulted because I had slipped and crossed the line, and no one helped me back up because they were all splitting a gut.

That's similar to what Paul is referring to here. A believer, for one reason or another, is suddenly tripped up by his trespasses, and is flat on his face for everyone to see. A good example of this is Peter. He boasted that he would never bail on Christ and yet he ended up denying Jesus three times in a row.

Paul says that you (plural) who are "*spiritual*" are to help a fallen follower. I guess that means no one on our missionary team was qualified because none of my teammates even offered to help me up! This is not referring to mystical spirituality but to normal Spirit-filled Christianity. You don't have to be a super saint to help others. Spiritual people are ordinary people relying on an extraordinary God.

The one who has fallen is in need of restoration. To "*restore*" means to make something right by bringing back to its former condition. This word was used for mending a torn net in [Matthew 4:21](#) or for setting a broken bone.

[Hold up Walking Boot] This boot is used for severe sprains or fractures and is designed to bring healing. If someone has experienced dislocation, or brokenness, or has been torn apart by transgression, he or she needs teammates who will help bring healing.

Friends, if we are not actively looking for ways to bring back those who are spiritually sidetracked, how will they get back on their feet? Who does God want to restore through you? Is there anyone you can think of right now who is going down the slippery slope of sin? If a man is my brother (or a woman my sister), then I *am* his (or her) keeper.

Broken believers need compassionate Christians who will come alongside in order to mend them. This process must be done with gentleness, which is a fruit of the Spirit. The King James uses the word "*meekly*" which has the idea of doing something quietly and with enormous kindness. When a friend is down you don't

announce it to the world but instead you touch with tenderness. Paul told Timothy to correct ***“his opponents with gentleness”*** in 2 Timothy 2:25. Romans 2:4 tells us that its God’s kindness that leads a person to repentance.

I asked the staff during our team time how they feel when someone is harsh when offering correction. Here are some of the responses I wrote down – *“I feel like giving up, I get angry and defensive, I feel small, beat up, and defeated.”* Then I asked how they respond when someone is gentle. The consensus was that while correction still hurts, we are more open to accept it.

Before confronting someone, ask yourself these questions: *How do I like to be corrected when I mess up? Do I want to be clobbered with a club or do I want someone to come with compassion?* Paul asked this question in 1 Corinthians 4:21 when he wrote: ***“What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?”***

Paul chose the terrain of tenderness when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:1: ***“I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...”*** Once again, Jesus is our model and our motivation. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus describes Himself as ***“gentle and humble in heart.”***

The last part of verse 1 is a rebuke to our self-righteousness: ***“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*** The phrase ***“watch out”*** refers to taking aim, or spying on yourself. Gentleness is born out of a sense of our own weak and wandering hearts. When we see someone else slipping into sin, we should pause and ask the Lord to keep us safe from the sins that slip us up. James 3:2 reminds us that ***“we all stumble in many ways”*** and 1 John 1:8 declares that we all struggle with sin: ***“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*** 1 Corinthians 10:12 sounds the alarm that we’re just one short step from falling ourselves: ***“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”***

All of this has application to parenting, doesn’t it? Our goal is not just to pronounce punishment but rather to discipline as part of discipling our children. Our aim should always be gentle restoration when our children need correction. If you want to learn more about purposeful parenting, jump on edgewoodbaptist.net and sign up for the Parenting on Purpose seminar on Saturday, October 22.

Several years ago, an angry man rushed through a museum in Amsterdam and repeatedly slashed one of Rembrandt’s most famous paintings. A short time later,

another man went into St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash a Michelangelo masterpiece. These two cherished works of art were badly damaged. What do you think the officials did? Did they throw them away? Not a chance. Using the most qualified people they could find, working with care and precision, they made every effort to repair the treasures. Are you ready to restore God's masterpieces? Is there anyone you know who has slipped up and needs some help walking again? **[Hold up Boot]** Remember to treat God's treasures with tenderness.

#2: Relieve the Burdened (2)

Spiritual growth is a group project. The first thing we're called to do is to *restore the broken*. The second part of our group project is to *relieve the burdened*. Look at verse 2: ***"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*** The word ***"bear"*** means to remove or lift an overwhelming load. A burden is like a weight on someone's life **[Go to Barbell]** weighing them down as they stagger along the highway of life. This may represent any number of things: sickness, a sudden tragedy, a feeling of being overwhelmed, personal loss, financial difficulty, broken dreams, a failed marriage, family problems, career setbacks, or the death of a loved one.

I find it significant that Paul does not focus on what the burden is or where it comes from. That doesn't seem to matter. *What matters is that when we see our brother or sister staggering under a heavy load, we should help them bear that load.* Instead of judging them, we're to assist them by doing whatever we can for as long as we can. Interestingly, the tense indicates that we're to *"keep on bearing burdens."* That includes even helping those who hate us. Exodus 23:5: ***"If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him."***

When we help the hurting, we are ***"fulfilling the law of Christ,"*** which is summed up in John 13:34: ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."*** In other words, when we see someone who has been rocked by the reality of life, or crushed by the weight of the world, we should ask ourselves a simple yet profound question, *"What would Jesus have me do?"*

One of my friends who doesn't live around here is going through a really hard time. I've been trying to bear his burdens over the phone. This week he sent out an email update. Here's part of what he wrote: *"My heart and attitude are still up*

and down. I have discovered that I am not safe to be honest with some people regarding all of this. I am not dealing real well with the guy who wants to tell me how I should feel and that I should not feel this way and that it is all OK and it will be fine... I may be able to give intellectual assent to some of those things but I'm really not up for a lecture at this point."

He doesn't want a lecture; he wants people to help lift his load. He's looking for some brothers who will help bear his burden [**ask for volunteer spotters for weights**].

We need to be careful that we're not the cause of someone's burdens. Jesus had no tolerance for those who piled people with problems and endless expectations. Some of His harshest words are reserved for religious leaders in Luke 11:46: "***Woe to you...also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.***" I certainly don't want to be guilty of preaching in such a way that you leave here more burdened than you did when you came in. Friend, do you pile people, or are you a load lightener?

Spiritual growth is a group project.

#3: Repent of Bragging (3-5)

God knows that you and I will not *restore the broken* or *relieve the burdened* if we're too full of ourselves. Verses 3-4 challenge us with the third part of our group project - to *repent of bragging*: "***For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.***"

It's so easy for us to look down our noses and say, "*They deserve it.*" "*She's so weak.*" "*He just can't handle the pressure.*" "*I saw it coming.*" "*Maybe they'll listen to me next time.*" "*I don't want to get involved.*" "*I'm just glad it's them and not me.*" "*I know I would never do something like that.*" How quick we are to condemn, and to look the other way, as we pass by on the other side of the road.

The implication is that if we refuse to restore the broken or relieve the burdened, it's because we think we're better than others. [**Walk over to trophy**]

If you think you're something special, then you'll find it easy to condemn. But if you know you're nothing apart from the grace of God, then you'll be quick to

forgive and ready to help the hurting. 1 Corinthians 4:7 sets us straight: ***“What do you have that you did not receive?”***

If we find it easy to condemn it may be because we have an inflated view of ourselves. If we were more conscious of our own sins, we'd be more forgiving of the weaknesses and failure of others. *So before you condemn or criticize, take a good look in the mirror.* We're not as hot as we think we are, and our faltering friend isn't as bad as we think he is.

Romans 12:3 tells us to ***“not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to”*** because when we're conceited we become critical of others and won't help those who are hurting.

Last Sunday at the end of a triathlon, an amazing demonstration of how a brother should help a brother took place. Here's the first sentence from a New York Times story: *“An elite triathlon race in Mexico ended dramatically...with one brother helping another across the finish line.”*

Jonny Brownlee of Britain was leading with less than half a mile to go when he slowed and staggered to a water station. His brother, Alistair, was in a battle for second place with a runner from South Africa. When Alistair saw his brother almost fall over, he pulled Jonny's arm over his shoulder and began hauling him along.

Watch what happens and pay particular attention as this brother *restores the broken* and *relieves the burdened*. Notice also how the man who ends up winning needs to *repent of his bragging*.

[Play Video]

[Go back to Trophy] Are you all about yourself? It's time to repent of any pride.

Spiritual growth is a group project.

#4: Respect Your Boundaries (5)

Restore the broken. Relieve the burdened. Repent of bragging. Our final task is to *respect boundaries*. Look at verse 5: ***“For each will have to bear his own load.”*** While verse 2 refers to an overwhelming burden that we cannot carry by ourselves,

the word “*load*” in verse 5 describes a soldier’s backpack. [**Hold up Drawstring Backpack**]

The word for “*load*” is something small and light enough for everyone to carry. *It’s the difference between a backpack and a boulder.* We’re to bear that which is too heavy for another human to handle alone but we cannot carry someone else’s responsibility.

Some of you have the tendency to take everyone’s cares and concerns on your shoulders. Perhaps you do this out of genuine compassion or maybe you have a little co-dependency going on where you *need* to feel needed. Whatever the case, don’t carry what is not yours. You were never designed to carry the world on your shoulders.

Others of us struggle in the opposite direction. Maybe you’re burned out and you frankly don’t care about people’s problems. Or maybe others have burned you and you don’t want to get involved again. While we’re not expected to carry another person’s backpack, [**Hold up Drawstring Backpack**] be careful about backing too far away from people who are trying to lift loads that they cannot bear.

In other words, we should help each other bear the big burdens of life, but there are personal responsibilities that each person must bear for himself. There are times when you have to pull back until the other person begins to take responsibility for what is theirs alone. Just as Jesus didn’t chase after the rich young ruler when he walked away from a decision, so too, we need to let people make their own choices (see Matthew 19:16-22).

I hope you’re seeing how important it is to be part of a Growth Group. Are you aware that thanks to Pastor Tim’s leadership, we now have *36 different Growth Groups*? 12 of them meet on Sunday mornings and the rest meet during the week. I want to introduce you to someone who understands that *spiritual growth is a group project*.

→ Interview with Tim Fitch

1. Tell us a little about you and your family.
2. Why did you and Kara initially decide to join a Growth Group?
3. What are some of the benefits you’ve found to being in a group?

If you are looking to plug into a group, *now* is the time to do so. We have 4 brand new groups that are forming – one for men and another for women. We also have two other mixed groups, one in Davenport and one in Moline. We also have a 4-week Next Steps group for those new to Edgewood that begins next Sunday morning at 9:30. A new group will begin the first Sunday of every month. For more information and to sign-up, simply go to edgewoodbaptist.net.

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

- An empathetic person came along and said, *"I feel for you down there."*
- A Pharisee said, *"Only bad people fall into pits."*
- A gossip wanted to know all the details.
- A self-pitying person said, *"You should see my pit."*
- A legalist said, *"You deserve your pit."*
- A psychologist noted, *"Your parents are to blame for your pit."*
- A self-help therapist said, *"Believe in yourself and you can get out of the pit."*
- An optimist said, *"Things could be worse."*
- A pessimist said, *"There's nothing worse than this."*
- Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

Here's the question for us today. *Will we partner with Jesus to restore the broken, relieve the burdened, repent of our bragging and have a healthy respect for boundaries?* We don't have to carry the world on our back because Jesus has the world in His hands.

Aren't you thankful that God is in the restoration business? He doesn't give up on us when we grieve Him. He doesn't stop loving us when we can't lift our load. He pursues us even when we're proud. And He breaks through when we operate without boundaries.

If you know Jesus Christ through the new birth, you are a son or a daughter of the King and that makes us brothers and sisters. We are who God says we are.

Closing Song: Who You Say We Are