

# LEAN ON ME

GALATIANS 6:1-5

**BECAUSE WE BELONG TO THE SAME FAMILY OF FAITH, THERE WILL BE TIMES I NEED TO LEAN ON YOU AND THERE WILL BE TIMES YOU NEED TO LEAN ON ME.**

## I. COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY (VS 1-2)

**PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS TO HELP CARRY ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS.**

- A. EVERYONE STUMBLES SOMETIME (1a)
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- C. EVERYONE IS CALLED TO LOVE (2)

## II. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (VS 3-5)

**THE OTHER PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS TO CARRY OUR OWN WEIGHT.**

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# Lean On Me

Galatians 6:1-5

In his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul emphasized that we are made right with God simply by placing our faith and trust in the finished work of Christ. No amount of religion, rule keeping or good deeds can put us in a right relationship with God.

Once we place our faith and trust in Jesus, we are free. We are free from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death. But Paul made it equally clear that we are not free to do anything we want. We are now free to love and serve God and one another. And we can do it all out of love and gratitude, not out of fear.

Paul said that when we make up our own rules for life, we are living according to the flesh. The interesting thing is that it is possible to be very religious and still be living according to the flesh. Living according to the flesh is living apart from the grace of God. Paul said this kind of life ultimately leads to bondage, sexual immorality, and all other kinds of immorality.

On the other hand, Paul said that when we live under the guidance and control of God's Holy Spirit, we are living according to the Spirit.

In this morning's text, Paul will give us some guidance on how to live in the context of a Christian community. In other words, we should have attitudes of helpfulness, usefulness, and encouragement.

But things don't always work out the way we think they should. When I first came to Devon Church, I kind of got lost in the neighborhoods. I knew the church was across the street from the post office. I asked some kids where the post office, and they gave me directions. I thanked them, and then as a kind of afterthought I said, "This Sunday I'm giving a sermon on how to get to heaven. Why don't you all come?"

The obvious spokesperson for the group said, "I don't think we'll be coming. Heck, you don't even know your way to the post office."

In this morning's text, Paul instructs us how to give and receive help in the context of community.

Paul again reminds his churches that freedom does not mean they can do anything they want to do. It doesn't mean they are free to be selfish, self-centered, or self-indulgent. It doesn't mean they are free to use other people for their own benefit and it doesn't mean they are free from their responsibilities to others. The main idea of today's text is this. **BECAUSE WE BELONG TO THE SAME FAMILY OF FAITH, THERE WILL BE TIMES I NEED TO LEAN ON YOU AND THERE WILL BE TIMES YOU NEED TO LEAN ON ME.** That's what it means to belong to a family. In his letter to another church, Paul said that we have to view ourselves not as an institutional church, but as the body of Christ. If one of us is hurting, we are all hurting. If one of us is successful, we are all successful. We are a family, we are a team, and we are a community gathered together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

In verses 1-2, Paul instructs Christians of our community responsibility. **PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS TO HELP CARRY ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS.** Again, it would be easy to misinterpret the concept of freedom and distort it to mean I am free of any obligations towards others. I will mind my own business and everyone else will mind their own business. We are not free from responsibilities toward one another.

For example, in the first half of verse 1, Paul reminds us that everyone stumbles sometime. Look how he starts off this section in verse 1. He addresses them as

brothers and sisters. Take a moment and look around you. You will see many different races, ethnic groups, cultures, and social groups represented here. If we have all placed our faith and trust in Jesus, then we are brothers and sisters. This is not just some nice politically correct sentiment. This is a fact because God made it so. Every person is not a child of God nor is every person part of the family of God. Paul made it clear that we are only entitled to address God as Father because when we gave our lives to Christ, we received God The Holy Spirit Who enables us to call God, Father. I'm not calling us brothers and sisters out of some sappy human sentiment. God says we are brothers and sisters because we have the same Father, we have the same Lord, and we have the same Spirit. We are responsible for one another and we are responsible to one another. We have been set free and empowered to serve one another. There will be times we need to ask for help and other times we will be able to offer help.

And that brings us to a time we will all need help. The NIV says, "if someone is caught in a sin." This is very accurate, however, I also think it is easily misunderstood. The word caught does not mean that a person is sinning, and then someone else catches her. It's not as if someone is secretly sinning and another finds out.

The word means more like someone caught in a trap. The word is *paraptoma*. It means something like a slip. It definitely refers to a slip-up. This is not intentional sin here and it is certainly nothing sinister. We will all stumble in our Christian walk. Here is the idea. As God's children, we are Satan's enemies. He sets all sorts of traps for us along the way. Sooner or later, we will stumble and get caught in one of his traps. It happens to us all. It is at these times we need help from one another to overcome a sin.

You have heard me say this at least a thousand times. We cannot defeat Satan alone. God has given us the gift of community. If we want to effectively defeat sin in our lives, we must take advantage of all the gifts and resources God gives us. I can usually tell if a person is serious about defeating sin. They will take advantage of every resource. I have worked with several of you that are dead serious about defeating sin. I have recommended that you seek counseling from a professional ... and immediately you did it. I have then recommended that you get into an accountability group ... and again you immediately did that as well. I know you are going to defeat sin because you are attacking it at a physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual level. Nobody is going to defeat sin by going off alone and working on it. That's exactly what Satan wants us to do. When we are alone, he can fill our heads with all sorts of lies and garbage. God has given us the gift of community to defeat the evil one.

Just as we will all stumble from time to time, everyone will be strong sometimes as described in the second half of verse 1. Paul says that when we are spiritual, we will be responsible to restore those who have slipped. There is a lot here. First of all, when Paul says spiritual, he is describing someone who is living according to the spirit rather than the flesh. All of us have experienced times in our lives when we were in the zone. We were totally listening to God and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us and control us. So he is not talking about some level of holiness. He is talking about a time when we are under the control of the Holy Spirit. Being spiritual means submitting to the Holy Spirit.

That's interesting because he goes on to say that we are to restore the one who has slipped and fallen gently. The word restore has to do with healing like a physician. It is not an inquisition or scolding. It is as if someone tripped and fell and we are helping them to their feet. Gently is an interesting word. Gentleness is a fruit of the

Spirit. It is a word that means meekly, carefully, and attentively. The word gentle is a word that we said last time meant power under control. Being spiritual means being under the control of the Spirit. Being gentle means bringing all our power under control and submitting it in love to be controlled by the Holy Spirit in order to love others.

The warning Paul gives us is to be careful as we help to restore others that we may not also be tempted. I don't know if you ever stopped to think about this, but I have noticed that I am much more aware of faults in others that are actually some of the greatest faults in my own life. We often see sin in other's lives that are the sins in our own lives that we are perhaps more guilty of. So we must be very careful not to be hypocrites.

Furthermore we must be careful not to be self-righteous. The temptation would be to think we are somehow more spiritual than the person we are helping. That is why it is best if we keep a close watch on our own souls as we help others. That way we will always have a clear perspective on what we are doing and who we are.

I have seen the worst of hypocrisy and self-righteousness played out in church. I have seen people brutally criticize others for an infraction ... only to see these very people themselves caught in worse types of immorality.

When we have slipped and fallen, we should not be ashamed to ask for help. When someone asks us for help, we should give it without judgment because we have already been in their position or we will someday certainly be in their position. That's why in verse 2 Paul reminds us that everyone in the church is called to love.

You know, it's easy to criticize people who are failing or who have fallen. Paul has just told us to help people up. Now he is going to tell us to carry their burden. Many times in Paul's letters this word for burden has a financial aspect. But it is also broader. Instead of criticizing, do something.

Think of it like this. When we sin, we owe a debt. Jesus steps in and says, "Put it on my account. I'll take care of it." In the New Testament book of Philemon, the Apostle Paul befriends a runaway slave named Onesimus. It just so happened that Paul seems to have known his owner. When Onesimus decides to go back home, Paul says this, <sup>15</sup>"Perhaps you could think of it this way: Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him back forever. <sup>16</sup>He is no longer just a slave; he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup>*So if you consider me your partner, give him the same welcome you would give me if I were coming. <sup>18</sup>If he has harmed you in any way or stolen anything from you, charge me for it. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, write this in my own handwriting: "I will repay it." And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!*

<sup>20</sup>*Yes, dear brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. <sup>21</sup>I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!" (Philemon 15-21 / NLT).*

Did you hear Paul say, "Put it on my account."? That's the attitude we must have. I'm sure this probably comes as a shock to most of you, but I am a party animal. Those of you who go out quite a bit will recognize the type of person I am going to describe. It doesn't matter if we go to a bar or restaurant or anywhere else. There is always the guy in the group with "alligator arms." It's the guy who never picks up a check or buys a round of drinks. This guy is a drain on the group. I'm using he, because it's usually a guy who is willing to eat and drink food and drink others are paying for, but he never seems to pay for others.

Learn to have this attitude of, "Put it on my tab," when it comes to helping and serving in the family of God. Please don't have alligator arms because when we are willing to serve, give, love, and absorb, we fulfill the law of Christ. The Old Testament law could be characterized as, "Do no harm." The Law of Christ says, "Actively and sacrificially love each other as Christ has loved us." We are called to love. Look for ways in which you can say, "Put it on my tab," financially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

In Jesus' parable of the "Good Samaritan," He pointed out clearly how religious people had alligator arms when they saw a person in need. It was one of the religious outcasts that came along, helped the guy, and said, "Whatever he needs, put it on my tab." We are free not to be so self-focused and self-absorbed. We are free to love one another. **PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS TO HELP CARRY ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS.**

We talked about the guy with alligator arms. This guy becomes a drain on the community. That's why in verses 3-5 Paul talks about our personal responsibility. **THE OTHER PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS TO CARRY OUR OWN WEIGHT.** We all recognized people we could identify with alligator arms when it came to paying their fair share. But we can also identify people who don't pull their own weight. While other people set up camp, they just sit around until everything is done. These people expect others to set their tents for them as well. Paul is very clear in all of his writings that everyone should pull their weight. In one of his letters, Paul said that if people don't work, they shouldn't eat. It's this same principle.

Verse 3 describes personal deception. Paul says, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." How clear can that be? There are people who think they are spiritual giants when in reality they are spiritual babies. Here is how you identify them. People who are self-righteous, critical of others, and not very aware of their own shortcomings are deluded. I know people who think they are good-looking, smart, and clever. In reality, they are dolts. How sad is that? Look there are people who do a lot of things in church who feel they are spiritual. In fact they will readily point out the faults and shortcomings of others. They are the most harmful to themselves and to the weak in the community. The mature Christians recognize them and ignore their criticisms. They are dangerous to baby Christians or weak Christians because they look holy because they are doing a lot of things in church. And when they criticize others, they are making themselves more holy, that they are able to detect the sins of others. If you are a baby Christian or a Christian who is not so mature, be on the lookout. Don't assume that people who are doing a lot of church work or religious things and talk religiously are necessarily holy. If they are critical of others and seem to be pretty self-righteous when they talk to you or others, then beware. They have deluded themselves into thinking they are something when in God's eyes, they are nothing. Don't let them fool you.

People who live by the Spirit usually have a good handle on who they are. Verse 4 describes one of the primary characteristics of a mature Christian, personal honesty. People who are self-righteous and self-deluded are able to fool themselves by comparing themselves to others. For example, they compare themselves to drug dealers, prostitutes, and other criminals. They may compare themselves to people in the church that only come on Sundays. So for example, the person who comes to church each Sunday and Wednesday night prayer meeting may think they are superior to those who don't attend prayer meeting. But that is all the wrong idea. Why don't they ever compare themselves to missionaries who gave up everything, including their health and oftentimes their lives for Christ? For example, why don't

they compare themselves to Mother Teresa, Father Damien, Hudson Taylor, or other missionaries that were killed in serving God? Here is what a mature believer does. She compares herself to Jesus Christ. It doesn't take long for her to see how far short she falls from the righteousness of Jesus. She immediately thanks God for His love, grace, and mercy. Further, she is able to look at others without criticizing them or judging them. She is able to extend love, grace, and mercy to them. I'm not suggesting that we spend our lives navel-gazing, but I am suggesting that we quiet ourselves before God often and take a good honest look at who we are. A mature believer ought to be able to state three things without even giving it much thought. The mature believer should be able to articulate sins that she is trying to conquer in her life. She can tell you what God has been doing in her life. And she will be able to tell you what God has already accomplished in her. It is good for us regularly to reflect on what God is doing in our own personal lives. I've found that the most gracious people I've come across are the ones who take a great deal of time in self-reflection before God. They have a very healthy sense of how holy God is and how far short they fall from that holiness. They have a very realistic sense of how much God has forgiven them of and of how much they are in need of God's continuing grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness. And because of this, they are able to extend all sorts of grace, and mercy, and love to all those around them.

Verse 5 reminds us that we have to make a personal commitment. This almost seems contradictory to what Paul said in verse 2. In verse 2 Paul said that we carry each other's burdens. Here in verse 5 he says that each one should carry his own load. In verse 2 Paul was talking about helping someone when they have exhausted their own personal resources. In other words, someone has slipped into sin and needs help to get back up. Someone may have exhausted all their financial resources and needs some financial help. In that case, we should help.

On the other hand, if a person is able to work and refuses to work because he doesn't like the jobs that are available and wants to ask for money, we should not give that person money. Paul says, "Each one should carry his own load." The word for load here is something like a backpack. In military terms it would be a rucksack. In other words, Soldiers carry their equipment, their food, and their tents in their rucksacks. When they go out on field maneuvers, they must carry everything with them on their backs.

What if one soldier said to another, "Would you please carry my rucksack for me along with yours? I think I just want to enjoy the walk and scenery." No doubt the other soldier would have some words of response for him, none which we can repeat here in church. The word Paul uses for load has this idea of a rucksack in mind. Each soldier must carry her own rucksack. In other words, what we can do for ourselves, we ought to do.

Let's say that we fall into sin. We can expect others to come along side us and help us up. But in the end, we must take personal responsibility to fight the sin ourselves as well.

I think too many times in our churches in the United States, we expect some kind of magical result. We want other people to take responsibility for our sin and our healing. I used this example before, but let me use it again. Let's say someone is addicted to something like pornography. He comes to church and tells the deliverance team that he wants us to pray for him and deliver him. Yet, on the way home he stops in a pornography shop and rents some videos. In the morning, he feels remorse, and wonders why the prayers of deliverance didn't work.

If a person came to me addicted to pornography, I would suggest that he go to a professional counselor who dealt with addictions, and perhaps specialized in sexual addictions. I would then suggest the person get an accountability partner and perhaps work through some sort of discipleship material. In addition to all this, the person should be involved in a recovery group. At the same time, I could work with the person and the deliverance team could pray with him.

In order to overcome the addiction, the person has to take a lot of personal responsibility for getting well. And in most cases, people with addictions of any kind, don't want to assume any responsibility for being addicted nor do they want to do all the personal work it takes to get free. They find reasons not to go to counseling. They talk as if in going to a recovery meeting, they would have to lower themselves to be in a meeting with other addicts. They see how screwed up the other addicts are, but somehow are unable to relate that to their own lives. So most addicts refuse to continue on with counseling and recovery groups. When they are unable to overcome the addiction, they blame it on everyone but themselves. They would even say things like, "That pornography store shouldn't be allowed to be open. If it wasn't here, then I wouldn't be tempted to rent the videos." Addicts of all kinds, and people who are struggling with habitual sin, usually want others to take responsibility for their sin and their inability to overcome it. It doesn't work that way.

Let me again congratulate many of you who have overcome addictions and habitual sin. I have seen you go through the hard personal work of going to counselors, putting yourself in accountability groups, and go to deliverance sessions. What I am most impressed with is how you continue to refuse to blame your addiction or your failure on anyone but yourself. I have seen you struggle and win. And I am also impressed to see you continue to fight to remain free.

It is because you have taken personal responsibility for overcoming these addictions and sin that God has blessed you with freedom. Continue to fight on.

To all of us who come to church, I can preach a sermon, a Sunday school teacher can teach you a lesson, but I cannot go home and read the Bible for you. I can't go home and memorize verses for you. I can't go home and pray for you and meditate for you. You have to take personal responsibility to do these things for yourselves.

I can't obey the Word of God for you. The board members can't go feed the poor or support the church for you. You must take personal responsibility for your own spiritual journey in Christ. We can all help, but the primary responsibility is each one's personally.

I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm about to say. We have never asked for money since I have been here at Devon Church and as far as I know, we are not about to ask for money. But think about the people who sacrificially give money to keep these doors open at church. Think of the people who sacrificially give of their time to volunteer in all the ministries and to clean the church. When we are in our personal times of prayer, we ought to ask ourselves if we have alligator arms when it comes to giving money to the church or if we are letting other people carry our rucksacks when it comes to volunteering. Again, please don't misunderstand me. I believe that God doesn't need our money to make His work go forward. Giving is a privilege. Serving is a privilege. Jesus said that He could tell where people's hearts were by the way they spent their time and money. There are no rules here about giving money or serving in the ministries. But at the very least we must realize that **THE OTHER PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS TO CARRY OUR OWN WEIGHT.**

Yes, Christ died to set us free. But that freedom does not have anything to do with self-indulgence or selfishness. We are free to love and serve God. We are free to love and serve one another. God has given us as very special gifts to one another.

**BECAUSE WE BELONG TO THE SAME FAMILY OF FAITH, THERE WILL BE TIMES I NEED TO LEAN ON YOU AND THERE WILL BE TIMES YOU NEED TO LEAN ON ME.**

In order to achieve this, we must also be set free from the way our culture indoctrinates us. We are taught to be narcissistic. In talking about modern psychological disorders, Herbert Hendin says:

*"It is no accident that at the present trends in psycho-analysis are the rediscovery of narcissism ... The society is marked by a self-interest and egocentrism that increasingly reduces all relations to one question, 'What am I getting out of it?'"*

Let's stop asking what am I getting out of this and start asking how I can contribute to the well being of others in the church and how can I contribute to the well being of the church community. To quote the song, "Lean on me when you're not strong ... someday I'll need a friend to lean on."