

ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY

2. Brothers — Burdens — Broken Bones

Galatians 5:26–6:2

This is our second installment of a series titled ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY. This morning we're going to focus in on a portion of a letter written to Christians living in the mid-first century. Turn in your Bibles to the New Testament — to the letter to the Galatians (between 2 Corinthians and Ephesians)

But before dive into those verses, I want us to look at three verses that explain the pastoral heartbeat of this series.

***Proverbs 27:23 (NKJV)** ²³Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, And attend to your herds;*

***Acts 20:28 (ESV)** ²⁸Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

***Ephesians 4:11–13 (CSB)** ¹¹And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, **growing into maturity** with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.*

***Colossians 4:12 (CSB)** ¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is **always wrestling for you** in his prayers, **so that you can stand mature and fully assured** in everything God wills.*

Spiritual Maturity is not a factor of accumulating Biblical information or mastering theological concepts — it is a matter of being mastered by the text! The mature Christian is someone who has made it their rule to *not ask*, “How does this passage, this truth, make me feel?” Maturity happens when you make it your rule to ask, “What is this passage, this truth asking me to do?” — “In light of this passage how do I need to change?”

John 8:31 (The Message) ³¹Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. “If you stick with this, **living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure.**

It’s my heart that all of us would *stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills* concerning community.

Some of you might already be tempted to tune me out **because** you have had a painful experience as you sought to live out your life in Jesus with other believers. Perhaps you feel like an outsider in the church that you’ve called “home” for a long time. If one or both of those are the case — you’re not alone. Valerie and I have experienced those same things!

Maybe after being disillusioned and hurt (which we’ll see in a moment is actually where community becomes real) you’ve determined to remain distant and disconnected in order to protect yourselves from further pain and disappointment.

Perhaps you might be the person who has managed to remain aloof and distant to those around you. Perhaps you have never engaged in any meaningful fellowship and real concern for those outside of your circle of close friends.

It’s my prayer that those who have been hurt, or are hurting right now, would experience Jesus healing your broken heart **AND** that our King would reveal to us our PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY as citizens in His Kingdom to be instruments in His hands to bring healing where there is hurt and brokenness.

It’s my prayer that we will not merely take the Biblical data concerning community and file it in its proper theological category. It is my desire for everyone who knows and loves Jesus to **be mastered by** what the Bible says about community because community is not an option or an add on to the Gospel. It is ESSENTIAL to the Gospel.

es·sen·tial

adjective — absolutely necessary

- fundamental or central to the nature of something or someone

noun — a thing that is absolutely necessary:

Community is essential to the Gospel because the Gospel is the message of what God has done to rescue and redeem us our little, doomed *kingdoms of one* to life in the forever Kingdom of God.

***Colossians 1:13 (ESV)** ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

***Colossians 1:13 (The Message)** ¹³God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up in the kingdom of the Son he loves so much,*

We've been saved to a life together with other redeemed men and women.

***Acts 2:41–42 (ESV)** ⁴¹So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and **the fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

***Ephesians 2:19–21 (ESV)** ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints and **members of the household of God**, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, **being joined together**, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

Even as Community is essential to Gospel living — there are things ESSENTIAL to community.

Last week we learned that for community to be real involves **brotherly love**. **Brotherly love** is not a side note to, or optional add-on to the Gospel (like a condiment that you can choose to put on a hamburger or not). It occupies a central place in the Gospel living. (we spent last Sunday walking around in what this sibling love really is and what it really involves — get resources from last week)

Brotherly love is where genuine Christians discover that “community” is way more than a beautiful idea. In reality — it’s a truth that might not always make us feel good.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer — *“Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it (that community of believers) had sprung from a wish dream.” But God speedily shatters those dreams.”*

“Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great sense of disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves.”

Bonhoeffer essentially argued that we can only experience genuine community — genuine sibling love — when our dreams have been shattered and we see the broken sinners around us for who they are. And here’s the really hard bit — they must see us for the broken sinners we are.

HERE’S THE DEAL — That kind of failure and disillusionment is NOT the end; it doesn’t mean that we better find another “community”. That kind of failure and disillusionment is actually the beginning of community **because** our faith is built on a man on a cross.

Let’s open our Bibles to the last verse in [Galatians 5](#)

[Galatians 5:26 \(CSB\)](#) ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

[Galatians 6:1–2 \(CSB\)](#) ¹Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted.

²Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

THAT is how brotherly love behaves.

Let’s start with this

Galatians 6:1-2 Brothers.....² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Bearing Burdens

FIRST — Bearing each other's burden is based upon what brotherly love IS — what *brotherly love* entails. Follow me here.

Not all burdens are the same; and not all of us bear our burdens the same way. Some can carry heavy burdens for a long time without those around them knowing they're even carrying a burden — or have no idea how big that burden truly is. To know that **that** brother or sister is burdened presumes *Philadelphia* — presumes *brotherly love* that involves shared space in the real estate of our lives — proximity. The kind of proximity where you know the person well enough to know that something's off. You know them well enough to notice the slightest sign of strain that others might not pick up on. It presumes the *transparency* involved in *brotherly love*. The person who is burdened knows they have permission to share their burden with you — and they have the assurance that they can share that burden with you without fear. That said — even the strongest individual can reach the point when it becomes obvious that they are beginning to breakdown under the weight of some burden.

While some people bear burdens in that way — others don't bear up under even the slightest burden. They walk into a room and you'd have to be blind to miss the fact that they are bearing some kind of burden. But you still need to be living and breathing *brotherly love* to observe them and respond to it.

SADLY — There are brothers and sisters who can go to the same church for years and not notice the needs of those who are not their closest friends. To bear another person's burden involves MORE than being in the same room with them week after week! You have to be willing to step into the space of others to see the obvious burden!

SECOND — To bare that person's burden requires the intimacy that is a part of *brotherly love*.

If you see a guy struggling along with a really heavy object, **how** do you bear that burden with him? You have to go right where he is; get really close — so close that some of the burden slide onto you. The intimacy required in bearing each other's burden is costly.

THIRD — To bare that person's burden requires *brotherly love*. Remember from last week: sibling love involves shared resources.

What if you or I see a brother or sister in Jesus who is **bearing an emotional burden**. Maybe we see in their face that they've been weeping — or perhaps we actually see them weeping. But we struggle with the idea of going across the room to listen to them **because** we were hoping to catch up with our friends — or perhaps we made plans to hang out with them after church. Perhaps we struggle with the idea of going across the room to listen to them **because** we don't want go to their house and spend an evening listening to them. We don't feel like doing that **because** it is draining.

But here's the deal — They feel better when you listen to them. They feel like they're not facing this alone. **You** are getting **drained** — but they're being **built up**. You're being drained because you joined them under the weight of their burden. As you share in their suffering you are losing some emotional resources in order to help them bear their burden.

What if there's a brother or sister in the community of believers you are a part of who has a **financial** or **economic** problem? There's no way to help bear that brother's or sister's economic burden unless some of their burden falls onto you. You **can't** bear their burden without you losing some of your resources.

QUOTE: Jonathan Edwards (*Treatise on Christian Charity*) — *“In many cases, we may, by the rules of the gospel, be obliged to give to others when we cannot do it without suffering ourselves. . . . We should be willing to suffer with our neighbor and to take part of his burden on ourselves. Otherwise, how is that rule of ‘bearing one another’s burdens’ fulfilled? If we are never obliged to relieve others’ burdens except when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor’s burdens when we bear no burden at all?”*

If we say, “I would love to help, but I can’t afford it” what we really mean is, “I can’t help without burdening myself. I can’t afford to help without really hurting myself.” But **Galatians 6:2** is telling us that **that** is how **brotherly love** behaves.

This is a huge diagnostic tool — If *bearing one another’s burdens* is the way a community of spiritual siblings is supposed to *live* — **Galatians 6:2** is like the spiritual equivalent of the medical telemetry devices found in a hospital room or at an exercise stress test (the screen that displays BP, heart rate, O₂ saturation levels). In the light of **Galatians 6:2**, how are we doing? What does this verse tell us about our spiritual health as individuals within this community? What does it tell us about our spiritual health as a community?

Let’s roll back to Verse 1

Galatians 6:1–2 (CSB) **¹Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted.**

I believe this one exposes how Biblical community is virtually non-existent in a church culture that talks so much about Community. Within church culture in the U.S. a large number of Christians in their 20’s and 30’s say that what they value above all is “community.” Churches advertise themselves by saying that “community” is one of - if not the most important of, their core values. This verse is like Inigo Montoya saying: *“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”*

There are so many professing Christians who will say that they belong to a community of believers. They nod in agreement that community involves transparency (another popular word in Christian vernacular — A word people keep using — but I do not think it means what they think it means!)

Here’s why I say that: It turns out they actually aren’t too keen on transparency that involves self-disclosure of sin, or their own sin being discovered. At the very possibility of that happening they walk out of that community and walk into another community where they can hide or a community that downplays sin,

downplays the damage and collateral damage of sin, and the crucial role brothers and sisters in Jesus play in restoring what was broken by sin.

HERE'S THE DEAL — Real community involves genuine *brotherly love* that possesses the intimacy and transparency necessary to address habitual sin. Biblical community involves genuine *brotherly love* that possesses the willingness and the perseverance to do the heavy lifting involved in the work of God to restore what sin has broken.

Some people are afraid of the transparency involved in restoration because they have never experienced the kind of love that actually says it's safe to disclose their sin. And if their sin has been **discovered** rather than disclosed, they've never experienced the kind of love that says it's safe to stay because they are surrounded by spiritual siblings who truly love them and truly want to see their broken lives restored and made whole.

restore — is translated from a Greek medical term for “setting a broken bone.” In medicine there can be no diagnosis - no prescribed treatment - no rehabilitation *without an examination!* Again — to live and breathe restoration presumes proximity and intimacy.

In the physical world, there are some breaks that you have to be blind to not see. You don't have to be up close or use imaging to see a person has an open fracture — the bone has been so severely broken that it ripped through the skin. You do need imaging to be able to see what other damage might have been caused by the break and how to reset the break so it will heal properly (Cory and Rachel Willer's little girl).

Spiritually, there might be people in a community of believers who walk in and they are like the person with a compound fracture. Whatever the sinful behavior is — the fact of that sin is THAT observable. But it will require transparency and intimacy to get an understanding of how that person is going to be restored.

In the physical world, there are some breaks that you can't see. It requires the doctor touching the limb or checking range of motion to see if a bone is broken or if imaging is necessary.

Spiritually, there can be sin that has broken a person's life that isn't so obvious. But the shared space and intimacy and transparency involved in *brotherly love* lets people get close enough to see that something is broken. Some circumstance, some conversation causes a person to respond a lot like a person in the exam room when the doctor applies even gentle pressure to the patient's limb.

I say all of that because RESTORATION PRESUMES that a FAULT has been observed. The very ACT of restoration PRESUMES that brothers and sisters looked at an individual and could discern spiritual "broken bones" if you would.

you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit

Community is Biblical — community is real — when spiritual siblings acknowledge the fact of sin without condemning the person — and they go about the process of restoring their brother or sister — the process of *setting the bone* — in humility, with grace and the love of God, not with condemning hearts! AGAIN — this flows from the magnificent heart of our Savior and Brother, Jesus.

AGAIN — it is incredibly RARE to see a community of believers live and breathe this process — it is incredibly RARE to see a community of believers actually get to the act of restoration because the person whose life is broken by sin runs and hides, or those who've observed the fault condemn the broken person — contribute to more brokenness.

AGAIN — the kind of community that lives and breathes restoration is rooted in sibling love — which is rooted in the reality of Hebrews

Hebrews 2:11 (NLT) So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.

We relate to each other as brothers and sisters on the basis of what Jesus did (he brought every one of our sins to the cross) to make **us** sons and daughters of **His** Father. That makes Jesus **our** big brother — and HE is **not ashamed** of **us**. We are now siblings IN Jesus.

RESTORATION requires *brotherly love* — which involves shared resources; the resource of time; the resource of mental and emotional energy. Think of the time

needed to **minister** to the fallen person; the time and mental/emotional resources it will require for them to **recognize** their sin, **repent** of their sin, and be a part of the process of **restoration**. That can be a very *frustrating* labor of love. Restoration can be a very frustrating and a very lengthy work of love; helping them as they limp through the process of recovering from their sin. Think: Physical Therapy/Rehab. When I was coaching High School football at Servite high school in Anaheim I will never forget watching and listening to one of the coaches rehabbing a sophomore QB after knee surgery (pre-arthroscopic era). You could hear those soft-tissue adhesions being broken apart as the coach moved his leg of the table. And you could hear his screams! Restoration can be painful to all parties involved! It drains you.

By the way — for all the time and love exerted, the person may go back out and sin!!

watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted.

ESV — Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

We won't be able to correct somebody gently if we're looking at them thinking, "I would never be tempted to do that."

I used to be so abrasive — so harsh with people — because I never saw myself in their position. Time and failure and received grace have done so much in my life when it comes to restoration.

LET'S CLOSE by going back to the last verse in **Galatians 5**

Galatians 5:26 (CSB) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

The word **conceited** is a unique Greek word. Outside of the New Testament the word was understood literally as "empty" — usually in associated with things, but

also persons.¹ It meant that a man or woman was empty — hungry in the center of his being.

I think this exhortation sits as the introduction to bearing each other's faults and restoring each other's brokenness because it speaks to **motive within community**. An empty person — a person hungry for glory, hungry for recognition and acceptance shrinks from transparency involved in brotherly love; shrinks from the cost of sharing resources involved in brotherly love. They view community as the place where their own needs are met.

To live and breathe burden bearing — restoring community **involves** men and women who know how empty **they** are without Jesus — and have experienced the life changing love of Jesus that overflows that emptiness.

Paul **doesn't** say, "*Bear one another's burdens because that's the rules.*" He says, "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*" — "*Bear one another's burdens because Christ bore your burdens.*"

Jesus Christ didn't step into our humanity just to get near us. He forever united Himself with our humanity so that He could go to the cross — not to take a little bit of the burden of our sin — not just a little taste of our brokenness. He bore ALL of it!

Isaiah 53:4–6 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus Christ bore all of our sins, all of our punishment, all of our guilt, and all of the human races on himself, and it crushed him. He did it for the joy of making the way for you and me to be the sons and daughters of HIS Father — the Joy of being OUR brother — and you and me being brothers and sisters IN Him.

¹ Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (p. 426). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

That's why Paul said, *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. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Jesus! His love humbles us out of our emptiness! His love humbles us out of fear and selfishness. THAT is at the core of how we live in essential community, bearing one another's burdens and restoring lives broken by sin.