

One Another, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Bear One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:1-5

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson turns the warning of the previous chapter into a positive picture of body life, and what is doctrinally at stake is how the gospel reshapes the way we treat the fallen and the burdened. Paul has just warned against biting and devouring one another (5:15). Now he shows the alternative: a community that restores the caught gently and carries one another's burdens. Help your students see that this flows directly from the gospel. The same Christ who bore our sins now teaches us to bear one another's burdens. Restoration, not rejection, is the aim, because that is God's own posture toward his straying children.

A second doctrinal point requires care, because the passage holds two truths in tension. Verse 2 commands us to carry each other's burdens; verse 5 says each one will carry his own load. These are not a contradiction. The Greek words differ. The burden in verse 2 (*baros*) is a crushing weight too heavy to bear alone; the load in verse 5 (*phortion*) is the personal pack of responsibility and accountability that no one else can carry before God. Make sure your students leave understanding that mature discipleship runs to help with the first while never dodging the second. Both belong to the law of Christ.

At the same time, aim past information toward formation. Paul did not write this so the Galatians could correctly distinguish two Greek words. He wrote it so they would stop devouring and start restoring, so they would carry real burdens for real people and own their real accountability before God. Your students need to walk out of the room and either draw near to someone they have been judging from a distance, or let someone draw near to a burden they have been carrying alone. Hold the doctrine and the heart together. The gospel of the burden-bearing Christ makes burden-bearing Christians.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says, "if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (v. 1). What does it tell us about God's heart toward his straying children that the goal is restoration rather than rejection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the word "caught." Paul pictures someone overtaken, ensnared, trapped in a sin rather than coolly choosing it. The image evokes pity more than contempt. This is a person the

trap has closed on, and the question is whether the body will rush to free him or stand back and watch him struggle. Help students feel that the very framing already inclines us toward mercy.

Then dwell on the word “restore.” In Greek it was used for setting a broken bone and for mending torn nets (Matthew 4:21). It is skilled, patient, healing work that puts something broken back together so it can function again. The goal is not punishment, not exposure, not the satisfaction of being proved right, but the brother’s recovery. This single word reveals the heart of God toward his straying children.

Show that this mirrors God’s own posture. The Lord describes himself as one who does not desire the death of the wicked but that he turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11). Jesus told of a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one that strayed (Luke 15:4–7), and of a father who runs to meet the prodigal. The God of the gospel is a restoring God. When we go gently to recover a fallen brother, we are acting out the very heart of our Father.

Press the word “gently.” Restoration done harshly is no restoration at all; it drives the wounded further away. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (5:23), and Paul addresses this work to “you who live by the Spirit.” Ask students whether their corrections, when they offer them, carry the gentle, healing tone of a physician setting a bone, or the rough tone of a judge passing sentence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Restoration, not rejection, as the goal toward the fallen brother (Galatians 6:1)
- God’s heart that does not desire the sinner’s death but his return (Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9)
- Christ’s seeking love for the one who strays (Luke 15:1–7)
- Gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit essential to restoration (Galatians 5:22–23)
- The saving of a soul and covering of sins when we turn a wanderer back (James 5:19–20)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the word “restore,” used for mending bones and nets, reveal about the goal?
- How does going gently to a fallen brother reflect God’s own heart toward us?
- When you correct someone, is your tone more like a physician or like a judge?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about your instinct when you learn a fellow Christian has fallen into sin. Does your heart move toward gossip and distance, or toward gentle restoration? What does your honest answer reveal?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question goes straight for the instinct beneath the action. When word reaches us that a brother has fallen, something happens in the heart before we ever decide

what to do. For many of us the first movement is toward the phone, toward telling someone, toward a quiet satisfaction that makes us feel better by comparison. Help students name that instinct honestly without shame, because only what we name can be healed.

Draw out what the instinct reveals. Gossip and distance are not neutral; they are the flesh protecting itself. We talk about the fallen partly to manage our own anxiety, partly to feel superior, partly to avoid the costly work of drawing near. Distance feels safe. Restoration feels risky and inconvenient. The honest answer often reveals that we love our own comfort and reputation more than our brother's recovery.

Move toward hope. The point is not to despair over our instincts but to let the gospel retrain them. The same Christ who drew near to us when we were caught in sin can give us a heart that draws near to others. Encourage students to picture an actual situation, recent or current, where they chose distance, and to ask what gentle restoration would have looked like instead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fleshly pull toward gossip and self-protective distance (Galatians 5:19–21)
- The sin of slander and the call to wholesome speech that builds up (Ephesians 4:29–31)
- Self-examination of the heart's instincts, not merely outward actions (Proverbs 4:23)
- The gospel's power to retrain our instincts toward mercy (Titus 3:3–5)

Discussion Prompts

- What is your honest first instinct when you hear a brother has fallen?
- What does that instinct reveal about what you love and fear?
- Where have you recently chosen distance when restoration was the better way?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul warns the would-be restorer, “watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (v. 1). Why does Paul attach a warning about our own vulnerability to the work of restoring others, and what does it teach us about ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice the abruptness of the warning. Paul has just commissioned the spiritual to restore the fallen, and in the same breath he turns the spotlight back on the restorer: “watch yourself.” The very moment we stoop to help a fallen brother is a moment of danger for us. Help students see why. Standing over someone's failure tempts us to pride, and pride is precisely the condition in which we are most likely to fall ourselves (Proverbs 16:18).

Draw out what this teaches about our shared condition. There is no platform above the struggle from which we minister down to lesser people. The restorer and the restored are on the same

slippery trail. Paul, who could call himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), knew that the line between the one who corrects and the one who needs correcting is thin. "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Show how this warning actually makes restoration possible. A person who has forgotten his own capacity for sin cannot restore gently; he can only condemn. But the one who keeps one eye on his own footing comes alongside the fallen as a fellow traveler, not a superior. Humility about ourselves is what keeps our help from becoming hurt. The most dangerous restorer is the one who cannot imagine falling.

Apply it directly. Ask students to recall a time they grew critical of someone's sin and later found themselves tempted in the same area. The warning is not meant to paralyze us so that we never help; it is meant to humble us so that our help is gentle. We go to the fallen as those who could be next.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The restorer's own vulnerability to temptation (Galatians 6:1)
- Pride as the condition that precedes a fall (Proverbs 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:12)
- The shared sinfulness of all, leaving no platform above the struggle (Romans 3:23)
- Humility about ourselves as the safeguard that keeps correction gentle
- The possibility of a Christian falling away, requiring constant watchfulness (Hebrews 3:12-14)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the moment of correcting someone a moment of spiritual danger for us?
- What does "watch yourself" teach about the line between corrector and corrected?
- When has criticism of another's sin exposed your own vulnerability in that area?

Question 4

Student Question:

When you consider correcting or restoring someone, how aware are you of your own capacity to fall? Where might pride be hiding in the way you view people who have stumbled?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes Paul's "watch yourself" and turns it inward. Pride is the most camouflaged of sins because it disguises itself as discernment, as standards, as being right. Help students hunt for it in the specific way they think about people who have stumbled. Do they think "there but for the grace of God go I," or do they think "I would never do that"?

Expose the subtle forms. Pride hides in the relish we feel when a respected person falls. It hides in the speed with which we form a final verdict on someone. It hides in the assumption that our

own besetting sins are smaller and more understandable than theirs. Each of these reveals a heart that has quietly forgotten its own capacity to fall.

Point toward the cure, which is not self-loathing but honest memory. We remember what we were apart from grace, what we still are apart from grace, and what we have been forgiven. The person most able to restore is the one who has not forgotten the pit from which he himself was lifted. Encourage students to name one specific person they have viewed with pride and to ask the Lord to give them a fellow-traveler's heart instead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-awareness of our own capacity to fall (1 Corinthians 10:12)
- Pride's tendency to disguise itself as discernment or standards
- Remembering what we were apart from grace as the cure for pride (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)
- Gentleness and humility toward the stumbling as marks of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)

Discussion Prompts

- When you imagine correcting someone, do you feel “I could be next” or “I never would”?
- Where does pride hide in the way you view people who have stumbled?
- How does remembering your own forgiveness change the way you would restore them?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (v. 2). What is “the law of Christ,” and how does carrying one another’s burdens fulfill it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by defining “the law of Christ.” It is not the Law of Moses, which Paul has taught no longer binds us as a covenant (Galatians 3:23–25). It is the whole pattern and command of life that Christ has given his people, summed up in love. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). To live under the law of Christ is to let his self-giving love be the rule of our life together.

Show how burden-bearing fulfills it. Love is not an abstraction; it takes weight off another person's shoulders and onto our own. When we carry a brother's burden, his grief, his struggle, his fall, his need, we are doing in miniature what Christ did for us at the cross. “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering” (Isaiah 53:4). The law of Christ is fulfilled in burden-bearing because burden-bearing is the very shape of Christ's love.

Help students grasp the wonder of the connection. The one who bore the heaviest burden, our sin, all the way to a cross, now invites us to share in his work by bearing the burdens of one another. We do not bear them to earn anything; Christ has already borne what only he could

bear. We bear them because his love, having reached us, now flows through us. The burdened church becomes a living echo of the burden-bearing Savior.

Apply it to the body. A congregation fulfilling the law of Christ is one where no one is left to be crushed alone. The grieving are not left to grieve by themselves; the tempted are not left to fight alone; the fallen are not left in the pit. Ask students whether their church family is a place where burdens are actually shared, and whether they personally are carrying anyone's weight right now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law of Christ as the rule of self-giving love, not the Law of Moses (John 13:34; Galatians 6:2)
- Christ's bearing of our burdens at the cross as the pattern for ours (Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24)
- Burden-bearing as love made concrete, taking weight onto ourselves for another (Romans 15:1-3)
- The church as a body where the members care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25-26)
- Burden-bearing as grateful overflow of grace, not a means of earning salvation

Discussion Prompts

- What is the "law of Christ," and how is it different from the Law of Moses?
- How is carrying a brother's burden a small echo of what Christ did for us?
- Whose burden are you actually helping to carry right now?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of a heavy burden you are carrying right now, perhaps in silence. Why is it so hard to let your brothers and sisters help carry it, and what would it look like to let them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the command around. We readily picture ourselves as the helpers, but Paul's command also requires that some of us be willing to be helped. Many Christians will carry a crushing weight in total silence rather than let anyone share it. Help students name the burden they are carrying alone, whether grief, fear, financial strain, a struggling marriage, or a private temptation.

Expose why we hide. Pride tells us we should be strong enough to manage alone. Fear tells us that if people knew, they would think less of us. A false independence tells us that needing help is weakness. But Paul's command "carry each other's burdens" cannot be obeyed unless some

of us are willing to let our burdens be carried. To refuse all help is, in its own way, to refuse the body God has given us.

Move toward courage and concreteness. Letting someone help may mean telling one trusted brother or sister the truth, asking for prayer that is specific rather than vague, or simply admitting "I am not okay." Encourage students to name one person they could let in, and one honest sentence they could say. The body cannot bear what it does not know.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The mutual nature of burden-bearing, requiring both givers and receivers (Galatians 6:2)
- Pride and false independence as barriers to body life (Proverbs 18:1)
- Confession and shared prayer as means of mutual healing (James 5:16)
- The body's design for interdependence, where members need one another (1 Corinthians 12:21)

Discussion Prompts

- What burden are you currently carrying in silence?
- Why is it so hard for you, specifically, to let others help carry it?
- Who is one person you could let in, and what honest sentence could you say?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says, "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves" (v. 3). How does an inflated view of ourselves make us unable to bear one another's burdens, and what is the cure for self-deception?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set this verse in its flow. Paul has just commanded burden-bearing, and now he names the great enemy of it: an inflated self. The person who thinks he is "something" will not stoop to carry another's burden, because stooping feels beneath him. Pride and burden-bearing cannot coexist. Help students see that self-importance is not a small flaw; it is the very thing that makes us useless to a struggling brother.

Unpack the phrase "when they are not." Paul does not say we are nothing in an absolute sense; we are made in God's image and dearly loved. He means that our standing is entirely a gift. Anything good in us is grace. The person who forgets this and imagines he has achieved his own spiritual height "deceives himself." Self-importance is always a form of self-deception, a story we tell ourselves that is not true.

Name the cure. The cure is honest self-knowledge under the gospel. We see ourselves truly when we see that apart from grace we are sinners, that everything we have is received (1

Corinthians 4:7), and that the cross was necessary for us too. The humble person is not the one who thinks poorly of himself but the one who thinks truthfully, who knows he stands only by mercy. That person can stoop to any burden, because he has already been lifted from the lowest place.

Apply it to the body. Ask students how self-importance shows up in their congregation: the unwillingness to do the humble task, the assumption that certain service is beneath them, the comparison that ranks themselves above others. The remedy is not to grovel but to remember the cross, where the ground is level and every one of us stands only by grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-importance as self-deception that disqualifies us from serving (Galatians 6:3)
- Everything good in us as received by grace, not achieved (1 Corinthians 4:7)
- Humility as truthful self-knowledge under the gospel (Romans 12:3)
- The level ground at the cross, where all stand only by mercy (Romans 3:23-24)
- Pride as the enemy of the humble service the body requires (Philippians 2:3)

Discussion Prompts

- How does thinking we are “something” keep us from stooping to help?
- Why is self-importance always a form of self-deception?
- What does it look like to see yourself truthfully rather than poorly?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to think of yourself as “something,” more spiritual, more capable, or more deserving, than the people around you? How has that self-image kept you from humbly serving them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses verse 3 into the student’s own self-image. Most of us harbor some quiet sense of being “something”: more mature than the new convert, more faithful than the inconsistent member, more capable than the one who keeps failing. Help students locate the specific arena where they rank themselves above others, because the camouflage of pride is broken by naming it.

Trace the consequence. A self-image of being “something” always produces distance and withholding. We do not carry the burdens of people we secretly look down on; we manage them, advise them, or avoid them. The very sense of superiority that feels like strength is what disqualifies us from the humble service Paul commands. Ask students to connect their self-image to a specific person they have failed to serve because of it.

Point toward the gospel cure with hope. The answer is not to despise our gifts but to remember their source. The most capable person in the room is still a sinner saved by grace, still in need of the same mercy as the weakest. When that truth lands, superiority melts, and we become free to stoop. Encourage students to name one person they have looked down on and one humble act of service toward them this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to rank ourselves above others in the body (Galatians 6:3)
- Sober self-assessment rather than thinking more highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3)
- Superiority as the root of withholding service from others
- Grace as the leveler that frees us to serve the weakest (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific area do you quietly rank yourself above others?
- How has that self-image kept you from serving someone?
- What humble act toward that person could you offer this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hold together the two commands that seem to collide: “carry each other’s burdens” (v. 2) and “each one should carry their own load” (v. 5). How do mutual burden-bearing and personal accountability before God fit together rather than cancel each other out?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so give it room. At first glance verses 2 and 5 appear to contradict each other. Bear one another’s burdens, yet each carries his own load. The resolution begins with the words themselves. The “burden” of verse 2 (baros) is a crushing weight, too heavy for one person. The “load” of verse 5 (phortion) is a soldier’s pack or a traveler’s kit, the ordinary responsibility each person is meant to carry. Paul is not contradicting himself; he is describing two different things.

Explain the first truth: there are crushing burdens we were never meant to bear alone. Grief, temptation, persecution, the weight of a brother’s fall, the loads that buckle the knees. For these, the body of Christ exists. To say “carry your own load” about a crushing grief would be cruelty, not wisdom. The law of Christ commands us to share these weights, and a Christian who refuses help with them, or refuses to give help, has misunderstood the body.

Explain the second truth: there are responsibilities before God that no one can carry for us. Each of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:12). No one else can repent for me, believe for me, obey for me, or stand in my place at the judgment. To use “bear one another’s

burdens” as an excuse to dodge my own faithfulness, my own work, my own accountability, is to twist the command. Mature Christians refuse both extremes: they will not be crushed alone, and they will not shirk what is theirs to carry.

Show how the two hold together in practice. A healthy congregation is full of people running to help with crushing burdens while each one faithfully shoulders his own responsibility before God. The two commands are guardrails on either side of the road. Verse 2 guards against a cold individualism that leaves people to be crushed; verse 5 guards against a lazy dependence that dodges accountability. Together they describe a community both deeply connected and personally responsible, which is exactly the kind of community the gospel creates.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Crushing burdens (baros) meant to be shared in the body (Galatians 6:2)
- The personal load (phortion) of responsibility each must carry (Galatians 6:5)
- Personal accountability before God, of which no one can be relieved (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- The error of cold individualism that leaves people to be crushed alone
- The error of lazy dependence that uses fellowship to dodge personal faithfulness (2 Thessalonians 3:10–12)
- A community both interdependent and personally responsible as the gospel’s design

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between a crushing burden and your own daily load?
- Why would it be cruel to tell a grieving person to “carry your own load”?
- Where are you tempted either to be crushed alone or to dodge your own responsibility?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Galatians 6:1–5 as a whole: gentle restoration, watchful humility, mutual burden-bearing, and personal responsibility. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow through this passage, and what you will do about it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the lesson into one concrete commitment. Resist letting it stay general. “I want to be more helpful” is a wish, not a step. Help students name a specific person, a specific arena, and a specific action that flows from what struck them most in the passage.

Encourage them to connect the application to the part of the text that pressed on them. For one student it may be a fallen brother who needs gentle restoration rather than distance. For another it may be the courage to let someone help carry a burden they have hidden. For

another it may be the conviction of pride and a resolve toward humble service. For another it may be a neglected responsibility that is theirs alone to shoulder. The text itself should drive the response.

Close by lifting their eyes back to Christ. The goal of this study is not behavior modification but becoming like Jesus, the burden-bearer who carried our sins to the cross and now teaches us to carry one another's. Remind students that the same Lord who commands this supplies it by his Spirit. Send them out not with a heavy weight but with a clear next step and confident hope that Christ is forming them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of the Christian life as growing conformity to Christ the burden-bearer (Romans 8:29; Isaiah 53:4)
- The Holy Spirit's work in producing gentleness and humility in the believer (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Personal, specific obedience as the proper response to God's word (James 1:22)
- Christ as both the pattern and the power of the burden-bearing he commands

Discussion Prompts

- What part of this passage pressed on your heart most, and why?
- What is the one specific step you will take, and when?
- How will you depend on Christ's Spirit, rather than your own willpower, as you take it?