Hebrews 10:25 *Force of Habit: Encourage One Another*

***Two-Person Lift***Beth and I were married over Christmas break while we were both still in college. I had one semester left. She had a year and a half. We knew the plan was to go to seminary, but we also knew that Beth had to finish college before we went anywhere. That meant for the year after my graduation, I had to get a job.

I’m not exactly sure now why or how it happened, but I ended up applying to work at a furniture store. And they hired me. To deliver furniture.

Now, it may be hard to believe, but at the time I was not the specimen of strength and power you see standing before you today. When we got married, I was 130 pounds. 135 tops. I really don’t know how they looked at me and said: “Yes, this guy can deliver hide-a-bed sofas;” but they did.

My partner was a guy named Dan. Dan was huge. He easily doubled my weight. He played offensive lineman on his high school football team. He could carry really heavy things. So the joke was, whenever we got to a delivery site, I would hold the clipboard and the door, Dan would carry the couch.

Only, obviously, it doesn’t matter how big and strong you are, a couch is not something you can carry by yourself. So I had to help. I had to learn how to use leverage and angles and good lifting technique so that together we could carry mattresses and dressers and sofas and dinettes into people’s houses. I actually got pretty good at figuring out how to maneuver couches up split-level staircases and down into basements and that sort of thing.

In fact, a lot of the stuff that came to us from the warehouse was **marked with something like this: ‘Caution: Two Person Lift’.** It was a reminder—sometimes on painfully obvious pieces of furniture like the sectional with the recliner hidden in it—that some things are just too heavy to carry by yourself.

There’s a verse in the Bible that always makes me think of that sign. It’s **Galatians 6:2**, and it says this:

**2**Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

This is a sort of if/then statement. If you do the first part, then you accomplish the second part. If you carry each other’s burdens, then you are fulfilling the law of Christ. If you see somebody carrying something heavy, and you come to help, then in that way you are fulfilling the law of Christ.

That’s not normally how we think of the word “law.” We think of a law as a rule, as a checklist sort of thing. When we think of “law” we think of a list of “do’s” and “don’ts”; go to church, tell the truth, don’t lie.

But what Paul is talking about here is what Jesus identified as the most important law, the law of love. We touched on this real briefly last week, when we said that the church is the laboratory for learning to love. We remembered that Jesus, on the night of the Last Supper, said: “A new law I give you: love one another. This is how people will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35, paraphrased)

What we have here in Galatians is a real practical application of that: if you carry each other’s burdens, then you are fulfilling this law of Christ. And I don’t think this is just talking about moving couches.

I’ve got a visual here today. This is just a big empty box. But I want you to think of this box as something that all of us carry around in life. The verse says we are to carry each other’s burdens—so one of the implications is that we all have burdens. Let this box represent your burden. In this box then, are all of your hurts and your fears and your insecurities.

* Maybe it’s hurt from when your parents broke up when you were a child.
* Maybe it’s fear about the future because of a diagnosis you or a loved one is facing.
* Maybe it’s guilt you are struggling with because of a relationship that’s gone south and you’re facing up to your role in that. Or maybe it’s the feeling of betrayal because of the way somebody else has let you down. Or maybe it’s a little bit a combination of both those things.
* Maybe it’s feelings of resentment or even anger towards God over some things that have happened in your life that you still don’t understand.
* Maybe it’s…

You get the idea. We all have burdens. We all have stuff. And for the purposes of this illustration, let’s imagine that we all have a box, and we are all sticking all of our burdens in that box. And we stuff it all in there, and we tape the box shut, and we really don’t want anybody looking inside of the box.

In fact—kind of an aside—maybe this is one of the reasons it’s not so easy for us to come to church on Sunday morning. Because we just kind of know, we’re afraid, that if we show up on a Sunday morning when that box feels particularly heavy, somebody might get nosy and start poking around in our box, and we really don’t want anybody looking in there. So we can be kind of guarded with our box. We’re kind of protective of it.

But, for the purposes of this illustration, and in keeping with the verse from Galatians, what if God is putting a caution sticker on our box? What if God is saying: “This burden you are carrying, you need somebody else to help you”? That’s a “Two-Person Lift”. Or, what if God is saying to you: “Look around. There are a whole bunch of other people with boxes”—and there are, we gotta remember that we all have them—“and some of them could really use your help”? Not that you go around ripping open other people’s boxes; but that you’re there, and it’s clear, you’re ready to help.

What if God is saying to you, today, that you need to let somebody help carry your burden? What if God is saying to you that you need to help somebody else carry theirs?

***Re-Cap***Today is the last sermon in our series called **“Force of Habit.”** Since the New Year, we’ve been talking about making a habit out of Sunday morning attendance. We’ve been talking about the way good habits can make our decision-making process easier. How habits can create routines that reinforce the sorts of behaviors we want to exhibit. And so, we’ve talked about how Sunday morning church attendance can be a keystone habit that helps us develop patterns of speaking to God, listening to God, and being part of God’s body. Our key passage has been **Hebrews 10:19-25:**

**19**Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20**by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21**and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22**let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **23**Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **25**not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The main idea for the series is in verse 25. We should not get in the habit of not meeting together. Or, to put it more positively, we should make a habit of meeting together. And then, the sermons came from the “Let us” phrases. Verse 22: we meet together so we can draw near to God. Verse 23: we meet together so that we can hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. Verse 23: we meet together so that we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

And it’s that last one—the one that we talked about last week—that I said was probably the most important. Because as important as it is that we sing together—and it is!—and as important as it is that we hear from God together—I’m kind of partial to that one!—there are ways to do that alone. But the last one—fellowship, being a part of God’s body, spurring one another on--is something that only really happens when we get together. When we have the opportunity to build relationship.

And so this one gets an extra sermon. Last week we talked about verse 24; this week we are going to look at three words in **verse 25: encouraging one another.**

And the image I have here, the image I want you to have, is of that two-person lift. As a church, this is what we want to do for each other. Galatians called it carrying each other’s burdens. Hebrews calls it encouraging one another. But I think it is pretty much the same thing.

And this is what makes church, church. Right? You can come once a month. You can hit the major holidays and be here when the kids are up front. And if you do that, hopefully you’ll feel inspired. Hopefully, you’ll hear something that helps you learn about God. But if you are only here occasionally, if you aren’t regularly meeting together and plugging in to a group or getting involved in serving and volunteering, then you are going to miss this. If coming to church is not a habit, then it is hard to encourage one another.

I’ll put it like this, the big idea today: **You need the church, and the church needs you.** God has designed us to need other Christians to help us keep going in the faith. And he designed other Christians to need our encouragement. Your church needs you to be here; and you need your church to be here for you.

So, there are two main thoughts in that idea. We’ll take them one at a time.

***You Need Your Church***First, **you need the church.** Sometimes it is good to let others help carry your burden.

When some of us see a caution sticker like this, I know that we don’t see it as a warning so much as we see it as a challenge. Right? Some of us think like this. “Ohh, I don’t need any help with my box! You think I can’t carry that thing by myself? I’ll show you!” So we lift our burden by ourselves, and we stumble along as best we can, and we act like that box isn’t heavy at all.

Or, and I think this might be pretty common, some of us see this picture, and it reminds us of someone that we have asked to share our burden—somebody that we have trusted to carry some of our weight—but when we really needed them, the box got dropped. Maybe it was a parent, early on, and they didn’t hold up their end, so now you are really guarded. Or maybe it was a spouse, and you trusted them, but they dropped the box—the marriage fell apart--and so now, you just don’t feel like you can let anybody else be that other person in the picture. You’ve been let down before, so you figure you’ve just got to carry things on your own.

There are a lot of us, for a variety of reasons, who just don’t feel like we need others to help carry our burdens. We just figure we’ll carry that weight ourselves.

But when the scripture tells us to encourage one another; part of the idea is that we all need encouragement.

Let me do a quick little word study here. The word that gets translated as “encourage” is the Greek word **“parakaleo.”** It’s a word that means “**to come alongside of**.” That’s a good definition of what it means to be encouraged. It means to let someone else come alongside of you, to help carry the burden, to strengthen you. And the interesting thing about this word—if you remember last fall when we did a series on the Holy Spirit—is that “parakaleo” is the basis of the word **“Paraclete”** which is one of the names Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit.

So, in John 14, when Jesus was telling His disciples that He was going to leave, but He would send another—the “paraclete”—to come alongside of them and to encourage them; He was basically saying: I don’t want to leave you to go it alone, I don’t want you to carry the burden by yourself, so I’m going to send another—the Holy Spirit—to help you bear the burden.

God is a God of encouragement. He doesn’t want us to go it alone. He sends the Holy Spirit into our lives to encourage us. And He also gives us others in the church to encourage us.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church. And he talks about how all the various parts of the body—the eyes and the ears and the feet and the hands—need to cooperate in order to have a fully functioning body. But he knows that there are some Christian who might not think they need anyone else. So he considers how absurd it would be if various body parts **started to think that way:**

**21**The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” (1 Cor. 12:21)

Sometimes we think that we don’t need the church. We think that our spiritual health can work just fine independent of the support and input of other believers. But to think that way is just as foolish as thinking that an eyeball, unattached from any other part of the body, will be able to “see” anything.

I read an article this week by a man named Matthew Lieberman. Lieberman is a psychologist and a neuroscientist who wrote a book called *Social,* about how our brains are wired to connect us to each other. And the article was about how, to our brains, emotional and relational pain registers the same as physical pain.

He described this experiment where they had participants inside an MRI scanner and then they asked them to participate in an online game of virtual catch. Essentially, they were connected online to 4 or 5 other people and they were supposed to play this game where they passed a ball to each other. But what the test subject didn’t know was that the other 4 or 5 people were part of the experiment and after a while they were going to just start ignoring the test subject. They stopped passing him the ball. As the game went on, it became pretty obvious that one person was being left out, and when they interviewed the person later he described feelings of anger and rejection.

And, like I said, this took place inside an MRI machine so they took pictures of the subject’s brain while this was happening. And the amazing thing was, when they compared the scans to other scans they took while subjecting people to physical pain, they found that the brain scans were almost identical. All the same parts of the brain were lighting up in response to emotional pain as they did to physical pain. <https://www.discovermagazine.com/mind/ouch-in-the-brain-social-rejection-feels-like-physical-pain>

And the point is: we tend to take physical pain as a real and serious thing. If we break an arm, we go to the hospital and get help. But we tend to think of emotional pain as more… metaphorical. We say: “my heart was broken” but we really think: that’s just something I have to get over. But Lieberman’s point is: to the brain, both kinds of pain are equally real.

So when it comes to carrying burdens, maybe it’s o.k. to ask for a little help. Maybe it’s o.k. to say: “I need the church.”

Fred Craddock was a well-known, well-respected preacher of the last century. He passed away about 5 years ago, but he taught at Emory University and modeled preaching for a lot of young preachers. And he told a story about how his father was always a skeptic of Christianity. Fred’s mom would take the kids to church and Sunday School, but dad wouldn’t go. His line was always “All the church wants is another name, another pledge.” He would say: “The church doesn’t care about me.” He just figured the church was looking for another name on the roll, another dollar in the offering plate.

That was awkward for Fred, especially as he became a pastor. He’d try to talk to his dad about it, but his dad would always say the same thing: “another name, another pledge.” Until, one day, he didn’t say it. Craddock said:

He was in the veteran’s hospital, and he was down to 73 pounds. They’d taken out his throat, and he said, "It’s too late." They put in a metal tube, and X-rays burned him to pieces. I flew in to see him. He couldn’t speak, couldn’t eat. I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the windowsills, a stack of cards twenty inches deep beside his bed. And even that tray where they put food, if you can eat, on that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church.

He saw me read a card. He could not speak, so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare. If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story. He wrote: "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story."

I said, "What is your story, Daddy?"

And he wrote, "I was wrong." <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/29448/fred-craddock-tells-the-following-story-about-his-by-james-westmoreland>

Some of you think you don’t need the church. Some of you think: I’ll come once in a while, I’ll come for the music and the preaching, but I’ll get out of there before it gets too personal. Some of you think: I don’t need any help carrying my burdens, I’ll keep to myself, not get too involved. Another name, another pledge. I don’t need the church.

But I’m telling you: you’re wrong. You’re wrong. You need the church. It might not feel that way today, but someday it will. Don’t wait until it’s too late.

It’s good to let others carry your burdens.

***The Church Needs You***Then, the other side of it: **the church needs you**. Sometimes, you’re the one who needs to help carry somebody else’s burden.

Some of us look at this picture and our deepest, strongest response is: “I wish there were somebody to do that for me!” Some of us are looking for, praying for, somebody to come along and pick up the other side of that box. We wish somebody would show up for us.

And maybe, right now, you can be that person for somebody else in the church.

Some of us miss church because we deeply believe we are not needed. We feel useless, convinced we have nothing to contribute. We’re not like the head or the eye in Paul’s analogy about the human body, we feel more like one of the lesser parts of the body. But **Paul addresses that as well:**

**15**Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. (1 Cor. 12:15)

Encouraging one another is something we can all do. We don’t have to be particularly gifted or spiritually mature to come alongside another person with a smile, a handshake, or an offer to listen. Others really do need you. Your presence can make a difference. You are an indispensable part of the church.

An often-noted feature of the New Testament is what is known as the “one another” passages. There are all these passages where the phrase “one another” is used, and we are told to do certain things for brothers and sisters within the church. Depending on how you count them, there are anywhere from a dozen to 4 dozen of them. Hebrews 10 is one of them, where we are told to both “spur one another on” and “encourage one another.”

I mentioned to Beth this week that I think just about every preacher has a “one another” sermon; a sermon that works through the various “one another” commands. I don’t think I’ve ever preached that sermon, so this is going to be mine. Here is just a sampling of some of the ways the Bible tells us to treat one another. These are things the church needs you for.

I’m going to fire these off pretty rapid fire (I’ve got bookmarks on the tables in the lobby with a bunch of these passages listed as well.) As I read these passages, be praying that God would speak to you about ways you can show-up for other people in the church:

**1 John 4:11:** **11**Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This is the great, overarching, all-inclusive command to care for each other with love. The law of Christ.

**Romans 15:7** **7**Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Our church, our lives, should be welcoming places.

**1 Corinthians 12:25** **25**so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another.

**Galatians 5:13** **13**You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

Whoever would be great becomes the servant of all.

**Ephesians 4:32 32**Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**Ephesians 5:21** **21**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11 11**Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

**Hebrews 3:13 13**But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

God has ordained that his word not just come to us directly from the Bible but indirectly from the Bible through people. This is why the Bible says that the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.

**1 Peter 4:9** **9**Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

We are called to welcome one another, and open our lives and homes to one another. To be hospitable.

All of these verses are just a sampling of ways we can show up for one another. Ways that we can offer to be the other person carrying that box.

Most of the “one anothers” in the Bible are not suggestions, they are commands. The way God has designed the church is that we step up in community for one another. If you want to grow in your Christian faith and stay connected to God, then you need the church in your life. And if you belong to Jesus, and you are living for Him, then the church needs you.

So: how are you doing with this? The Bible says that we should carry each other’s burdens. We should encourage one another. How are you doing with this? Probably the best way to answer that is with a name. The best way to know if you are living this out, if you are encouraging others in the church, is if you can put a name to it. Who are you encouraging? Who are carrying a burden for? Think of a name. Then think of ways that you can come alongside that person and be an encouragement today.