

**Growing Strong Together by Lifting Weights**  
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We are in a sermon series called Stronger Together. We've been preaching on the one-another commands of the Bible. The phrase "one another" is found 100 times in 94 New Testament verses.

We started out by teaching how we are each part of the body of Christ. Romans 12:4-5 says:

*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

What does "we are members of one another" mean? The Amplified Version says:

*We are parts one of another (mutually dependent on one another).*

That means the one-another commands are reciprocal, which means that they speak of actions that are mutual, given by each toward the other.

Remember, you cannot obey the one-another commands without other people. You must be in relationship with others to do the one anothers! The other one another commands are ways of expressing our love. They are the way we grow stronger together.

The phrase "love one another" is mentioned 17 times in the New Testament – way more than the other one-another commands. We will never do the other one-anothers until we start loving one another. Love is the motivation to obey the one-another commands.

Another one-another command tells us to have compassion for one another. 1 Peter 3:8-9 says:

*All of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*

We are called and commanded by God to love one another. How do we do that?

Last week we saw that the starting place for the one anothers is to obey the command that is mentioned second most in the New Testament. That command is to greet one another and be affectionate to one another. We all have the responsibility to greet one another and initiate relationships with one another.

The one-another command that is mentioned the third most times is the command to carry one another's burdens. So I'm preaching today on Growing Stronger Together by Lifting Weights.

There are times when each of us get weighed down in life. At those times we need others to help lift that weight by carrying our burdens.

The command to carry one another's burdens is found 3 times in the New Testament – but there are 2 different Greek words that were translated “bear” in the English Bible and they have 2 different meanings.

Basically – the 2 meanings are to bear (or put up with) one another and the other is to bear (or carry) one another's burdens. Colossians 3:12-14 says:

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

The word translated “bear” here means to bear with, put up with, endure. And remember 1 Corinthians 13:7 says: *Love bears all things.*

The Amplified Version says: *Love bears up under anything and everything that comes.*

This is the hard thing about relationships: having to bear with or put up with other people's issues. But it helps to always remember – others are having to bear with you! Others have to put up with your issues!

Relationships require endurance! Some people think endurance means patience, but it's much more than having to wait.

The word endurance means the ability to withstand hardship or adversity.

The ability to sustain prolonged stressful effort or activity.

To put up with something or somebody unpleasant.

To keep functioning in spite of difficulty or adversity.

To suffer hardship without giving up or giving in.

The word endure literally means “to harden” as in to toughen up.

Relationships require endurance. Deb and I recently watched a show called The World's Toughest Race. This was a race through Fiji that included walking, running, mountain biking, rafting, boating, paddle boarding and mountain climbing. These teams race for days with virtually no sleep in all kinds of weather through all kinds of tough terrain. Those who finish are those who can endure heat and cold, blood, sweat and tears, lack of food and sleep, injuries, aches and pain without quitting.

And those who endure in relationships are those who can bear with other people and the aches, pains, blood, sweat and tears that accompany them.

And in this race – sometimes team members had to carry other team members who were wore out or injured. It's the same in relationships. Romans 15:1 says:

*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

The word bear here is different from endure. The Greek word translated bear here means to lift or carry with the intention of removal. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says it means to put on oneself something to be carried away. This same word is used in Galatians 6:2-5

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.*

There are several things I want us to see from these verses. First – it says when we help carry one another's burdens we fulfill the law of Christ. What is the law of Christ? The law of Christ is the great commandment. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. So, it is important for us to learn to love other believers in God's family. The Message Version of 3 John 1:5 says this:

*When you extend hospitality to Christian brothers and sisters, even when they are strangers, you make the faith visible.*

God says, "When you help others, you are making your faith visible." And this is how we grow stronger together – by carrying each other's difficult loads. That's how we build spiritual muscles! Plus, we can accomplish exponentially more when we lift burdens together.

At a county fair, many spectators gathered for an old-fashioned horse pull (an event where various weights are pulled on a horse-drawn sled and pulled along the ground). The grand-champion horse pulled a sled with 4,500 pounds on it. The runner-up was close with a 4,400-pound pull.

Some of the men wondered what the two horses could pull if hitched together. Separately, they totaled nearly 9,000 pounds, but when hitched and working together as a team, they pulled over 12,000 pounds.

That my friends is synergy – exponential power when we work together is greater than the sum of what we can do separately.

Now – there's something else I want to point out from Galatians 6. Verse 2 says: *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

But verse 5 says: *For each one should carry his own load.*

So which is it? Do we carry our own or do we carry each other's? Well – both. The word in verse 2 for burden means a load so heavy that you don't have the strength to carry it alone.

This happens in families all the time. People get weighed down with marital issues or children issues or loss of a job or family member or dealing with someone's sinful behavior or addiction. Sometimes these burdens are too heavy to bear alone. They are crushing.

You can tell someone is heavily burdened because they will say things like "I don't think I can go on" or "This is too much for me to carry." In those times – we are responsible to help each other. We need to crawl up under that burden and help them carry it!

That starts by asking, "How can I pray for you?" But, in addition to prayer, sometimes we need to listen or get them counsel or actual physical or financial help. That's how we are strong together!

But this requires discernment! Sometimes we help other people stay weak when we do something for them that they should be doing for themselves.

Remember, verse 5 says *each one should carry his own load.* This word for load is different from the crushing load in verse 2. Verse 5 speaks of a lighter load that you can carry on your own.

In Bible times, this was a military term than was used to indicate the amount of weight a soldier was expected to carry in his bag or backpack. We each have everyday burdens of working and paying bills and being responsible. And each of us should carry out our individual responsibilities in life!

No one is going to do your work for you! No one is going to pay your bills or raise your children or feed your dog or mow your yard or wash your laundry. Those are your burden to carry!

In case you haven't noticed it yet, there are freeloaders in our families and churches that are lazy or irresponsible and they expect everyone else to do for them what they should be doing for themselves.

This includes children who expect parents to do their science project and co-workers who constantly need your help because they procrastinate. There are also many people who are too lazy or irresponsible to work and pay their own bills. They always expect other people to bail them out. But the Bible teaches that everyone should carry their own personal responsibilities.

Biblically – we are responsible TO others and FOR ourselves. What's the difference?

Problems arise when people with heavy loads don't allow others to help. And, problems also arise when people with light loads act like they should not have to carry their own weight and everyone else should do for them what they should be doing for themselves.

So, the Bible says to set a boundary! When someone is under a crushing load – help them carry it! But do not empower freeloaders or irresponsible people! That will not help them grow strong!

Many parents are raising children who cannot carry their own load because they carry it for them. Many Christians think it is loving to always help everyone who asks, but the Bible tells us not to help people who refuse to carry their own load. Here's what the Message version of 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15 says:

*Don't you remember the rule we had when we lived with you? "If you don't work, you don't eat." And now we're getting reports that a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings are taking advantage of you. This must not be tolerated. We command them to get to work immediately — no excuses, no arguments — and earn their own keep. Friends, don't slack off in doing your duty.*

*If anyone refuses to obey our clear command written in this letter, don't let him get by with it. Point out such a person and refuse to subsidize his freeloading. Maybe then he'll think twice. But don't treat him as an enemy. Sit him down and talk about the problem as someone who cares.*

Wow! This shows us how to set boundaries in a biblical way.

We should speak the truth in love.

We should point out the boundary that is being crossed and the consequences of continuing to do so.

Then – if the person violates the boundary – allow them to suffer the consequences!

I know it's hard – but that actually helps them grow strong. Remember – God wants each of us to help others grow strong, and if we help people stay weak, we are actually hurting them, not helping them.

God want all of us to carry burdens and grow stronger together. There are times in life where we all need support in crisis times. You should not have to go through the tough time alone. You need people who care for you and are committed to help you. Someone to bear your burden. We all have burdens we should not bear alone.

We all need to learn how to go to God to receive His comfort. But sometimes God wants to comfort us through others. That's why the New Testament is full of "one anothers" – God chooses to meet some of our needs through other people.

Now ultimately, it is true that God meets our needs.

But He uses a variety of methods. One of those methods is other people. Just as He created us with physical needs, He also created us with spiritual needs. He created us with a need for Him and a need for others.

Here's a passage that actually says that. 1 Cor 12 talks about the different parts of the body of Christ and verses 20-21 say:

*As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 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!"*

No part of the body of Christ can say to another part, "I don't need you." That means we need each other. We need to meet each other's needs. One way we do this is found in Romans 12:15

*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

One way we help others to rejoice with them when they're happy and mourn with them when they are sad. Jesus did this. In Luke 10 – the disciples came back after Jesus sent them out to minister with a joyful report of healing and deliverance. Luke 10:21 says:

*At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit.*

It literally means Jesus jumped for joy. He rejoiced with those who rejoiced.

He also mourned with those who mourned. The most profound example of this is at the death of Lazarus. John 11 tells how Jesus went to the home of Lazarus to meet with his family. Verses 32-36 say:

*Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"*

Now think about this. What was Jesus about to do? Raise Lazarus from the dead. Did He know what He was about to do? Yes.

Did He say, "Stop your crying – or – Don't you have faith – or – God's going to bring good out of this – real soon."

NO – even though He knew Lazarus would soon live again, He still mourned with those who were mourning.

We must learn to mourn with people who are mourning. Even though we have faith and know God will ultimately bring good from the situation – the example of Jesus is to mourn with those who mourn. This is one important way to carry their burdens. We can comfort them with the comfort we receive from God. Remember – we go to God first and get comfort, but then we comfort each other.

The command to comfort one another is found 2 times in the Bible.  
1 Thessalonians 4:18 says:

*Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

So – we can comfort people with the word of God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. Notice that God comforts us so that we can comfort one another!*

Comfort involves hurting with someone, consoling them, easing their pain, and giving strength and hope.

Comfort is not trying to fix someone, correct them or motivate them.  
Comfort is not trying to talk them out of their pain.  
In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 5:4,

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

So, comfort comes to those who go through the grieving process.  
And God wants us to help carry their burden.  
To do so, we need to learn the vocabulary of comfort by saying things like:  
“I’m sorry that you are hurting.”  
“I’m standing with you during this.”  
“I love you and I’m praying for you.”  
Or just being with them and crying with them.

When we do this – we carry their burden and grow stronger together!  
When we do this – we are ministering like Christ!

As we close – I want to remind you that – Jesus carried the burden of all our sin in His body on the cross!  
Jesus carried our sickness. Jesus carried our infirmities.  
Jesus carried our sorrows.  
All we like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Give Him all your sin and burdens and He will carry them for you.

Then go out and help others carry their burdens. That’s how we grow stronger together!