

**“Load Bearing and Sharing”**  
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**First Congregational Church of Haddam**  
**Higganum Congregational Church**

**Galatians 6:1-10**

*“My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”*

As I've mentioned here before, I think, ten years ago I worked for one Christmas season as a UPS driver's helper.

It's still not clear if I got the job fair and square. I was trying to attend an initial interview, but couldn't find the place and spent some considerable time on the web and the phone tracking down someone at UPS to apologize and see if I could reschedule. Whoever I finally talked to sent me to a meet up where- I think- people who \_had\_ attended and passed the first screening were gathered to do paperwork and receive their uniform pants. No one ever asked me if I could meet the basic job requirements, which included lifting up to 70 lbs.

But I took the pants, and I showed up where they told me the next day and all the days until Christmas Eve, surprising the driver a bit on Day 2 he later told me, since apparently a lot of people bug out after one shift, and I, as a middle-aged, basically sedentary, mother-of-two, for some reason did not look like a very likely candidate to him.

For the record, I could, at least back then, lift 70 lbs. I know that because that year my kids each happened to weigh that amount, and before I submitted my online application I hugged them and lifted them off the floor, at least for a few seconds.

But as far as I can tell, UPS doesn't actually want its driver's helpers to lift anything that heavy, anyhow. The posted job description for the driver's helper does talk about handling packages that “may” weigh up to 70 lbs., but the training as I recall told us to put anything over 50 on a hand truck.

Since at Christmastime speed is the thing, my driver would send me to walk briskly with several smaller packages to addresses around where he parked, and he would either carry or roll

anything big himself up to the closest door- all in about half the time it would have taken me to just get the dolly unhooked from its spot in the truck.

The reason speed is the thing is that the day is over when the truck is empty, and delivery trucks with helpers are loaded with about two thirds more packages than those without. Each driver has the same basic daily territory, but algorithms set the edges differently depending on which online shoppers claimed free two-day delivery where, and the number of UPS employees on each truck- 1 or 2.

I mention this not-particularly-seasonal employment anecdote because our passage from Galatians talks in two places, and in what at first sounds like a contradictory fashion, about carrying loads.

In the King James which I think I memorized as a kid, Verse 2 reads: ***“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,”*** and Verse 5: ***“For every man shall bear his own burden.”***

So what gives? Stripped of context, in our current polarized era, the first sort of sounds Socialist, and the second Libertarian. It's confusing: is the apostle Paul advocating for a spiritual social contract, or campaigning for radical religious individualism?

A closer look suggests he's pointing to an ideal of Christian community that's different from either.

Paul uses two different words translated as “burden.” The Greek word in Verse 2 is *baros*, which does carry the connotations of our English “burden,” the weight that is too heavy to carry, like my hand-truckable UPS packages.

Helping others suffering from sin, “restoring” them, *katartizó* in Greek, means uniting broken parts: the word is used for setting bones so they can heal, or mending nets so they can be returned to service. The “burden” of those ***“who have received the Spirit”*** is gently to bring sinners back into Christ's body, the church.

The second Greek word, *phortion*, is something more like “responsibilities,” referring to the work Jesus' followers are given to do- like each day's truck that starts full and needs to be emptied. It's the same word as in Matthew 11 when Jesus says, ***“...my yoke is easy and my burden is light,”*** or in Ephesians where the Christian's job description includes: ***“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our very way of life.”***

The word for “work” in that Ephesians verse is the same word *ergon*, from which we get our modern word “ergonomic,” as in Verse 4 of our Galatians passage this morning. Rather than looking at the “work” another is doing, Paul instructs the Galatians to practice self-examination, cautioning that there can be a temptation to compare ourselves.

I felt badly when the driver I was helping carried those big packages himself. But in the spirit of these instructions to the Galatians, he didn't. My driver only wanted to get each day's work

done, and so long as the two of us, each doing what we could, got the truck empty of its regular and extra 2/3rds of a load by something like a normal quitting time, he was content.

Speaking of overloading, there's quite a bit more in this Galatians passage we just don't have time for today: what is probably the earliest discussion of pastoral compensation; the origin and an interesting application of the phrase "you reap what you sow"; and a suggestion of the tension that can exist between caring for all people and giving special attention to members of the church.

But in the interest of us having a normal quitting time, I want to lift up just one more of Paul's sentences: "***So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.***"

That UPS year was the longest Advent ever. It was good because I made money instead of spending it during some downtime between pastoral positions, and I exercised to the point of exhaustion instead of baking and eating cookies for four weeks. But I was never so glad to have December 24th arrive.

Having that end date gave me strength. When I thought "I just can't do this," I talked myself into each next day knowing there would be an end to it, sort of mentally dividing my remaining energy by the number of UPS workdays to come.

What we're asked to do with the Church, with building the Kingdom of God, is to give our all every day with no end in sight. When is this "harvest time" Paul mentions? Paul himself served his lifetime and then rested with his ancestors, and it seems just as likely as not all of us will too, without seeing the culmination of his and our labors. There's always another delivery to make. The truck is never empty.

Unlike me, the career UPS driver with whom I worked had a day off for Christmas and then was back in that truck on December 26th. Winter and summer, spring and fall, he'd worn those brown pants for 15 years then and unless he won the lottery is probably driving for UPS still and celebrating his 25th anniversary this year.

You know what helped him keep going? He knew the power of a real lunch break. He was a veteran, so he joined the VFW and every day would warm up or cool down eating his sack lunch in the lodge strategically located in the middle of his route. Where he went, I went, so that's what I did too.

Stopping moving. Sitting at table. Receiving hospitality. Being renewed. That's what helps us not grow weary in doing what is right.

I am glad you are here today. I am glad I am here today. That we may restore each other around this Table, and so fulfill the law of Christ, which is love. Amen.