



Galatians 6:1-5
This Is Us

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September

“Our Mutual Spurring”

We are in the third week of a series titled “This Is Us.” It’s about the four stated values of our denomination and our church. We’re part of a denomination called A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, or “ECO” for short. There are other Presbyterian denominations out there too – three larger ones besides ECO, and four or five others that are more regional or smaller.

ECO’s four values are: The Complete Local, A Livable Theology, Our Mutual Spurring, and Your Leadership Acceleration. Today is “Our Mutual Spurring.” Now, I’m no equestrian, certainly not a cowboy because I don’t listen to country music, but when I hear the word “spurring,” I think of horseback riding. Cowboys, as you probably know, wear spurs on the heels of their boots to kick into the horse and get it moving – to spur it along when it’s lagging, not moving forward the way it should.

This is exactly what this value is about. **ECO explains “Our Mutual Spurring” like this: “The strength of our covenant community is how we challenge one another to constantly transform.”** This isn’t simply about encouraging one another – yes, we do that too – but to spur someone on is to give them a bit of a challenge: to prod, to poke, not to provoke or upset anyone, but to move each of us forward along the path of following Jesus, transformed for his glory. If someone’s headed the right direction, we want to spur them on in that direction, which usually looks like encouragement. But if someone’s headed down a path that is ungodly and unholy, we don’t want to *encourage* that – we want to lovingly challenge them toward transformation instead. So, both sides of that coin are our mutual spurring.

And we see this in today’s passage. Let’s turn to Galatians 6:1-5. This is God’s Word to us today ...

Paul writes, first, “...if someone is caught in a sin...” The word for sin here is paraptoma, meaning a false step or a trespass. It combines the preposition para – “beside” or “alongside” – with the verb “to fall.” Put together, it means to fall to the side, the way you might fall to the side of a path. This describes someone who is on the path of following Jesus but has slipped and stumbled off track a bit.

It’s worth noting this is different from the word usually used for sin, hamartia, an archery term that more literally means “missing the mark.” In the language of walking a path, hamartia is more like walking the wrong path entirely; paraptoma is being on the right path but stumbling off to the side. Paul sometimes uses the words interchangeably, but his choice of paraptoma here seems intentional. He’s writing about people who are Jesus followers but slip and stumble off the path. In other words, he’s writing about all of us who follow Jesus, because we’ve all stumbled off the path.

“Caught” suggests being overtaken unexpectedly. So, this is someone who has unexpectedly been pulled and fallen to the side of the path of following Jesus. This is why Paul says to restore that person “gently,” which connects back to chapter 5, just a couple verses earlier, where Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit, and gentleness is one of them. When someone slips morally or ethically – does something out of character for a disciple of Jesus – a gentle word is usually all that’s needed. In fact, it may not even be a word of correction; it might just be gently making the person aware.

This happened to me a few weeks ago. I was at the home of a family who are near and dear to me, and I said something that was meant to be light-hearted and encouraging toward one person in the room. But for a couple others in the room, it came across differently – it was hurtful. One of the people who were there let me know the next day that what I’d said had hurt the others.

It was a gentle word, simply making me aware of the impact of what I said, so I could go and work to have the relationship restored. And that’s what I did. I went to those two people later that day, and we talked about what happened

-what I'd said, how it made them feel - and I apologized and asked for forgiveness, which I'm grateful was extended to me.

This wasn't a case of repeated offenses needing a major course correction – though if a major correction is needed, I sure hope someone will tell me. But this was a gentle word spoken to me just to make me aware. Then: **In verse 3 he writes, “If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.”** I don't want to deceive myself, and none of us should want to. Ignorance isn't bliss. The truth might be hard to hear, but it would be worse to go through life hurting others because of a lack of self-awareness. We all have our blind spots, so we need people speaking gently to us about where we've drifted off the path of following Jesus in our relationships.

Then, verses 4 and 5 are a warning to those who'd give that gentle word of correction: don't become condescending or arrogant. Don't come across like, “You fell to temptation, and I didn't. Neener-neener-neener!” That's not how we're to be – we're to judge ourselves honestly. So, in verse 4, Paul writes that each person can “take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else.” Some translations read “boast in themselves alone.” This sounds like a contradiction to what Scripture says about pride and boasting. Jesus teaches against pride, so do 1 Peter and James, Proverbs is full of cautions against it, and so is Paul, elsewhere.

But the word used here for pride/boast is one Paul frequently uses in a positive sense. For instance, he quotes Jeremiah: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31, 2 Cor 10:17; both quoting Jer 9:23-24). In Romans he writes, “We boast in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2). He also writes in 2 Corinthians about boasting in his weaknesses. All of these use the same word we have here in Galatians, which is a different word than the one used where pride and boasting are condemned. So, what's going on that Paul would now tell us to boast, or take pride, in ourselves?

A couple of things to note. **First, right here in the passage, we're told to test our own actions – to give an honest assessment of ourselves, based on**

honest self-testing. Paul gives no instructions on how, but you could certainly ask others in your life who might see the blind spots you'd otherwise miss.

Second, he says to do that boasting without comparing ourselves to others, and each carrying our own load. The stumbling block in pride is comparison: “Well...I’ve never done THAT sin, so clearly I’m a better Christian.” It’s easy to think that the worst sins are the ones we’ve never committed, right? That is comparative thinking Paul is steering us away from. Jesus died for your sin just as much as the other person’s. The field is level. None of us has an excuse. Our sin and our stumbling off the path may look different for each of us, but each of us has stumbled off the path of following Jesus and gone bushwhacking.

In Romans 12:3 – the verse just after the one we looked at last week – Paul writes, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...” The context, again, is about your faith. It helps us understand what we read here in Galatians: don’t get pompous about your faith and staying on the path of following Jesus. Don’t let your pride lead you to comparisons, or to laziness in your faith and how you live that out – “carry your own load,” as Paul writes. Be honest and truthful if you’re following Jesus well right now, or have a spiritual gift or Biblical understanding that can be used to help others. In other words, in order to come along side someone to lead or spur them on, you have to be willing to acknowledge that you’re in a position to do that.

I will also add, about this “sober boasting” as we might call it: Just a few verses later, **Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** It’s the same Greek root word as we have in today’s passage. So there’s a legitimate, truth-telling self-assessment we can engage in about our faith, to recognize when we’ve got something to offer others to spur them on. But we don’t find our identity in our faith – we aren’t the source of our own strength. We find our identity in Jesus, he makes us strong, and he is the one we ultimately boast about. The cross is the only boast that truly matters, in the end.

The other passage I gave serious consideration to for today comes from Hebrews. I set it aside because we just went through Hebrews, and I preached on these verses back in April: **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 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” (Hebrews 10:24-25).** This passage puts it even a bit more concisely than the Galatians one, using this word – spur. It’s a word that means a strong provoking or stirring, and it’s connected right there to “not giving up meeting together.”

What we see in all of this is that this spurring is mutual. We spur “one another.” Sometimes we need someone to spur us back on the path of faith. Sometimes we’re the ones doing the spurring – but doing it with healthy self-awareness and without judgment of others. There may be places in faith where “spurring” is keeping us going in the direction we’re already headed –it keeps us on the path of following Jesus. Other times, the spurring is something that gets us back on track, because we’ve slipped off. Something has unexpectedly overtaken us, and we’re off the path of following Jesus. Either way, we need spurring.

And here at Rose Hill Church, and throughout our denomination, we want to mutually spur one another on. We want to spur each other on in our discipleship to Jesus, in our worshipping life together, in our understanding of Scripture, our praying, and so forth. In a few weeks we’ll talk here about financial stewardship, and that’s an opportunity to spur one another on in financial generosity. Maybe we’ll make a contest out of it. Just kidding. The point is, we want to spur one another on.

The best place – really, the only place – for this spurring to happen is in the church. Only other Christians are going to spur you on or give you opportunities to spur them. We need people who know us well enough, where enough trust has been established, and where we’ve agreed on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, so that this kind of gentle correction can happen. This is one reason I love our microgroups here at Rose Hill. You’ve heard a lot about them over the last several weeks, but these groups of 3 or 4 people –

each one led by someone who's been part of a microgroup before – gather weekly to simply talk about Scripture and talk about life. These are opportunities to forge real and genuine relationships with Jesus at the center, where we can mutually spur one another on in faith.

This spurring also happens in sermons. It happens in discipleship classes and small groups. It happens in conversation in the lobby. It happens in our homes, in our families with other believers. There are a lot of opportunities. But the key is relationships that are built on the foundation of Jesus and his Word.

This is what we're about. We believe God is calling us to “lead people toward Jesus.” We could say, “spur people toward Jesus.” I want to lead you toward Jesus. I want you to lead me toward Jesus. **We are called by God to lead one another toward Jesus.** That is all of us spurring one another on – keeping us on the path and getting us back on it when we've slipped off. You can be part of this mutual spurring.

On October 11th and 18th, I'm going to be offering a two-Sunday class after worship about becoming a Covenant Partner here at Rose Hill Church. It's a class that explains who we are and what we're about. This sermon series is connected to that class, though I had to push myself to do it this way. I don't normally plug ministries and classes in sermons. I've seen churches and talked with pastors who've been at these churches where every sermon points people to church ministries. It feels like the sermon is just there to keep a ministry machine humming along. I want to point people to Jesus, not a program.

Having said that: becoming a Covenant Partner (what most churches call “membership”) is a step on the path of following Jesus here at Rose Hill, and a way to more deeply be part of this mutual spurring that we all need. It deepens your roots and opens doors of discipleship and relationship and accountability to be spurred in your faith, and opens opportunities to serve that and allow you to help spur all of us on toward Jesus.

Whether you're a Covenant Partner or not, I hope we'll take to heart this value of Our Mutual Spurring and live out what we read in Scripture that encourages us to do this. And most of all, I pray that this mutual spurring would move all of us along the path of following Jesus. Let's pray... Amen.