

157. SHARING THE LOAD - TUESDAY - SEPTEMBER 29, 2026

Good morning, Grace Harbor – it's Dan. Happy Tuesday!

I have to tell you, I really had no idea what I was signing up for when I volunteered to help with the squash harvest yesterday. It ended up being quite a day!

After dropping the kids off at school and getting up to the farm, I slid into the circle of farm hands right as Ted was starting to share the plan.

"Ok," he started. "Thanks to the rain, this year's going to be a bit different. But that's ok. We've got a good plan, we've got a good team, and we'll get it done."

I looked around the circle at the farm hands. All of them focused, all of them nodding in response to Ted's confidence, and... well... all of them at least 10 years younger than me – many even younger. My worry that I wasn't going to be terribly helpful started creeping back in.

But as Ted started to lay out the plan, it seemed that I'd be spared for at least a few hours. You see, he wanted to try to give the ground a bit more time to dry.

"In the meantime," he continued, "we aren't going to be able to cure everything in the field like last year, so we need to construct a couple hoop houses. Bill's here to help with that."

He motioned over, and sitting on a crate just outside the circle was Mr. Rutherford. He's been retired since before I moved to town, and I mostly knew him for his hobby of making wooden toys. But earlier this year, we discovered his hidden talent as an amateur plumber when he helped with a burst pipe at The Blue Anchor. I had no idea what a hoop house was, but it sure seems like Mr. Rutherford is the guy to call when you need someone handy.

Now, if you're as lost as I was, don't worry. After Ted sent everyone off to do their jobs, I asked Jamie, one of the farm hands, to translate everything for me.

He said, "After you cut winter squash like this from the vine, you want to cure them. That process hardens the outer skin. It's what allows you to keep them for a couple of months instead of just a couple weeks. It also sweetens the flavor."

He explained that last year they were able to line them up at the end of the rows and leave them to cure in the sun. "But," he went on, "because it's already wet and it's supposed to rain again before the end of the week, we need someplace that's going to stay dry. And unfortunately, the barn isn't an option because the Farmer's Market'll be there for a few more weeks."

"So, that's where the hoop houses come in?" I asked.

"Exactly," Jamie said, as he gave me a thumbs up and headed off to get started on his part of the plan.

I still had no idea what a hoop house was, but I saw Mr. Rutherford getting his helpers organized, so I listened in.

“For anyone that’s new,” he began, “a hoop house is basically a small, temporary greenhouse. We’re going to take some long PVC pipes and bend them into arcs. Then we’re going to cover the frame in clear plastic sheeting. We’ll also need to set up fans to blow air through, which means running power.”

We were able to get all of the prep done by lunch time, and then in the afternoon, the real work started.

I thought we could just cut the squash and move them directly to the hoop houses, but I was wrong. We needed to dry them off completely, as apparently moisture and caked on dirt can lead to rotting.

This meant that each squash needed to be cut, lifted out of the dirt, passed to a wiper, dried off, passed to someone who would carefully lay them in a wheeled cart, and then when the cart was full, it would get wheeled over to the hoop houses, where yet another team would lay them out to dry.

That’s at least a five person chain, and every job was important! Every step in the chain had to be done with focus and care because before they’re cured, the skin can easily bruise or even get punctured. If that happened, the squash was at risk of rotting and would need to be used as soon as possible.

The most common mistake people make, according to Ted, is they try to pick a squash up by the stem. It **does** look like a handle after all. But it's not. It breaks off easily, which not only means you're likely to drop it, but even if you catch it, the broken stem creates the same risk of rotting.

I was part of the cutting and lifting team, and the good news is that I surprised myself. I was actually able to make it through the afternoon. I was certainly slowing down toward the end of the day, but I made it.

The bad news is there is still a **ton** left to harvest. I don't know how we're going to get it all done before the rain returns. And the bad news for me personally, my back is **killing** me. My arms and shoulders too. I don't know how these guys and gals on Ted's team do it, but I sure am grateful for them. I know Ted is too.

In fact, since Tuesday is our usual day to practice gratitude, I wonder if **you** can think of any team efforts in your life – where everyone plays an important role. Maybe in your family, someone grocery shops, another cooks, and someone else sets the table or washes the dishes. Maybe you're on an actual team, like a softball team, and everyone has their position in the field.

Once you think of your team effort, share about how you all help each other – and don't forget to include yourself! If you need more time, feel free to pause the podcast, and I'll be right here when you get back.

[PAUSE]

It's great being part of a team, isn't it? Knowing you don't have to do everything yourself. Sometimes the strength we need to accomplish a goal is found when we share the load.

Ok, let's close in prayer. If you want to, you can close your eyes and fold your hands.

Dear God, we thank you for everyone who helps us. We can't do everything by ourselves, and so we're grateful for the people you have placed in our lives to support us. Help us keep our eyes open for the ways we can return the favor or pay it forward by helping others as well. Amen.

Ok, Grace Harbor, I'm going to find some ibuprofen and head back up to the farm. I don't know how long I'll make it today, but I sure want to try! Have a great Tuesday, and I'll catch you tomorrow.

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