



**SCRIPTURE:**

Colossians 4:7-18

**RECAP:**

Many of you know, I pastored a little church in Indiana prior to coming on staff at TJC. What you may not know is that prior to that, I was a youth pastor at another small church in Indiana for two years. That's where I gained a lot of experience.

During that time, my wife and I made a trip to Gatlinburg for vacation and on the way, we stopped at Mt. Juliet to visit Pastor Erik and Katrina. I think this was back in 2011. Erik gave me a book called 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Mark Dever, and it changed my life. For the first time, I saw in Scripture what a healthy, biblical church should look like. I saw the necessary elements and aspects every church should model. The problem was when I lifted my eyes from the book, and began to look at my church, I realized my congregation didn't look anything like what the Bible teaches, and this bothered me a lot! That led me into other revelations about the church at large. My eyes were opened to the fact that many local churches are struggling, declining, and even closing.

From this, God birthed in my heart a desire to lead an unhealthy church back to biblical principles. Many call it Church Revitalization work. In December 2012, I became the pastor of a church called Blue Ridge Christian Union Church, and I pastored there for 8 years before coming here.

When I first arrived, Blue Ridge was overrun with liberalism. There were leaders who didn't believe the Bible was God's Word or that Jesus was the only way of salvation. The pastor before me was runoff because of conflict. Because of that, the congregation didn't trust the current leadership. Attendance steadily declined for decades. Outreach and discipleship were virtually non-existent. The church was a mess.

So, for the next 8 years, by God's grace, I worked to lead the church back to health. I preached the Bible multiple times a week. We raised up new, biblically faithful leaders. Church discipline was administered when needed. Membership, discipleship,

evangelism, and missions were re-established. As a result, we saw a lot of fruit and success. Before I left, the church had two locations and a weekly attendance of about 160 people. Today, they have a faithful pastor leading them and continuing the work.

But it took its toll on me and my family. Towards the end I was burnt out, isolated and truly disillusioned by the ministry. Then Covid hit in the spring of 2020 and that exacerbated everything. That fall I took a Sabbatical for six weeks and made a visit to Pastor Erik's house for the weekend. It was the first time I visited TJC in this new building. I told Erik, I am not done with ministry, but I do think God is done with me at Blue Ridge. I am not sure I can go on anymore. That's when Erik asked me if I would be interested in coming on staff at TJC, and I am so glad he did, because being here for the last 18 months has saved my ministry and revived my family.

If you ask what's the biggest difference between Indiana and here, I would tell you one thing: Friendship. TJC has revived my soul and love for ministry because of the incredible friends and ministry partners I now have. Don't misunderstand me, I knew many wonderful people at my church in Indiana and still consider several good friends, but my particular role brought unique challenges and a lot of loneliness. The friends God has given me here have been a lifeline for my soul.

I bring this up because we're closing the book of Colossians today, and Paul's closing remarks revolve around his friends and ministry companions.

I have to admit, studying these closing verses this week has given me a whole new perspective on the Apostle Paul. I knew Paul had several ministry colleagues, but he always came across to me as somewhat of a loner, a self-sufficient tough guy who only needed Christ. There may be some truth to that, but the Apostle Paul relied upon his friends and ministry partners a great deal.

The closing section of Colossians is a snapshot of just a few friends Paul depended upon in his ministry. John MacArthur calls it "a verbal photograph" of Paul's friends. One NT scholar said, in all of Paul's writings, he lists up to 65 people who served alongside him in the ministry. In this passage, we're going to see eight of those friends.

My prayer for you as we look at these biblical characters is that you will see the value of friendship in the local church and understand that those friends have been providentially placed in your life by God to help you become more like Christ.

Here are 8 different kinds of friends you need in the church.

**Point #1-Faithful Friends: Tychicus (V.7-8)**

**VS7-8:** *Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,*

The first person we meet is Tychicus. Paul is sending him to the Colossian church to give the congregation an update on Paul's condition and ministry activities. He's also going to Colossae to encourage the church; probably by reading this letter to them and expounding upon what's been written.

Tychicus is mentioned five times in Scripture. We first meet him in Acts 20. He traveled with Paul from Greece to Jerusalem. He also made the Journey from Corinth to Macedonia. Traveling was very difficult in the ancient world, but Tychicus was willing to stick by Paul's side every step of the way. It's no wonder Paul grew to trust this man. He trusted him so much, in fact, Paul sent Tychicus to replace Timothy as pastor in Ephesus. In 2nd Timothy 4, Paul tells Timothy to come to him and in verse 12, he says, "Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus." In other words, you come to me, Timothy, and I will send Tychicus to take your place. He did the same with Titus. In the closing verses of Titus 3, Paul tells Titus, "When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis." Paul trusted this man to fill in some important pulpits.

Furthermore, Paul not only gave Tychicus the responsibility of delivering this letter to the Colossians, he also had the book of Ephesians and maybe even the book Philemon with him too. Ephesians 6:21-22 is identical to Colossians 4:7-8. "So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts." Colossae and Ephesus were near one another. So, Paul most likely sent Tychicus with both letters in hand on this journey. We also know that Philemon was a leader in Ephesus, and if you look at verse 9, Onesimus is going on this journey with Tychicus, and he was the slave who ran away from Philemon.

So, Paul trusted Tychicus to accompany him on his missionary journeys, to fill the pulpits of Timothy and Titus and then to carry up to three inspired letters. It's no wonder Paul calls him "a beloved and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord."

We need trustworthy Christian friends in our lives. We've all had people we couldn't trust or betray us. I know when I was not a Christians, my friends at that time were nothing more than acquaintances at best. Christians you will find friends in the church you could entrust your last dollar and even your children to. They're that dependable. That's because Christians are people of the truth.

You need trustworthy friends. You also need:

### **Point #2-Transformed Friends: Onesimus (V.9)**

That certainly describes Onesimus. Paul is sending Tychicus to Colossae. Verse 9 says, *"and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here."*

As I said earlier, we learn about Onesimus from the book of Philemon. He was Philemon's slave, but Onesimus ran away from his master. While on the run, he apparently met the Apostle Paul and got converted under his ministry. In the letter, Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon imploring him to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave but a brother. You will notice Paul calls Onesimus a "faithful and beloved brother", but he doesn't call him a servant, like he did Tychicus. This is not because Onesimus didn't serve the Lord. It's probably because that word servant means slave, and Paul doesn't want to draw attention to the fact that Onesimus was once a slave himself. Like in his letter to Philemon, Paul wants Onesimus to be viewed as a new man in Christ.

It's important to have friends in our lives who remind us of the amazing grace of God. We've all been saved by grace, but some Christians are constant reminders of the transforming power of God. They're living testimonies to the redeeming power of God. We need people like that in our lives because they remind us how good and kind and gracious God has been with us all.

Next, we need,

### **Point #3-Faithful Friends: Aristarchus (V.10-12)**

The next friend of Paul's we meet is in verse 10, *"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you."* He is either in prison with Paul at the time of his writing or he's been ministering to Paul while he's in prison. Either way, Aristarchus has been a blessing to him because of his faithfulness.

He not only stuck with Paul while he was imprisoned, but this man was also with the apostle in Acts 19 when a riot broke out in Ephesus. Aristarchus was arrested by the mob just for being friends with Paul.

He also accompanied Paul on his journey to Jerusalem when he took the Jews some money, and he remained with Paul on his journey to Rome. It's almost as if he never left his side. He was faithful.

Do you know those people who you can always count on? They're always there for you. When times get tough, you know you can count on them.

Thank God for faithful friends. You're also going to have challenging friends in the church.

#### **Point #4-Challenging Friends: Mark (V.10-12)**

That brings us to Mark. Verse 10, "*and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him.)*" In case you're wondering, yes, this is the same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark. He's also known as John Mark. John was his Jewish name. Mark was his Roman name. He accompanied the apostles and early disciples in their ministry.

Mark had a big falling out with Paul. After their first trip to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas took Mark with them to Antioch, and Mark joined them on their first missionary journey. However, Mark later abandoned Paul and Barnabas and went to Pamphylia. Later Mark wanted to rejoin them, and Barnabas was ready to take him back, but Paul did not agree. This led to a split between Barnabas and Paul. Consequently, the two groups went their separate ways.

This fallout might be why Paul says in verse 10 "concerning whom you have received instructions." Maybe Paul warned the Colossians about Mark's previous failures. You will have challenging friendships in the church. Maybe you're that challenging friend. As good as Christians are, they aren't perfect. They will disappoint you. But this is an opportunity to show grace.

Which Paul apparently did because it appears that he and Mark reconciled near the end. Mark's name appears in three of Paul's letters. Here, in Philemon 24 and then in Paul's final letter to Timothy he says, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2nd Timothy 4:11).

Sometimes those challenging friends are providential gifts of grace to help you practice patience, mercy, and forgiveness.

So, thank God for challenging friends. Thank Him as well for,

#### **Point #5-Encouraging Friends: Justus (V.10-12)**

That brings us to verse 11 and Paul's friend, "*Jesus who is called Justus.*" We don't know anything about this man other than what's written here. It's the only time he's mentioned in Scripture. Like many Jews, he had two names. Jesus was his Jewish name. It was a common name at the time. It meant Savior. But he probably started going by his Roman name, Justus (which means righteous), because of the respect he had for His Lord.

One thing we can say about this man is that he would have been an encouragement to Paul because he was a Jew who turned to Jesus. If you look at verse 11 it says, "*These are the only men*" referring to Aristarchus, Mark and Justus—"of the circumcision (Jews) among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me."

Paul didn't see many Jews converted under his ministry. In fact, he frequently had problems with them. So, having Justus by his side would have been a constant comfort and encouragement knowing that one of his kinsmen had come to faith.

One of the greatest attributes Christian friends provide is encouragement. I don't know about you, but I tend to get discouraged easily. Having friends here at TJC when I get down has been such a blessing. They know what to say when I'm at a loss. And they're always there to lift me up.

Thank God for encouraging friends. Also thank Him for,

#### **Point #6-Praying Friends: Epaphras (V.12-13)**

The next friend we meet is Epaphras. Verse 12, "*Epaphras, who is one of you (a native Colossian like Onesimus), a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.*"

We met Epaphras back in chapter 1. He knows the Colossians well. Many believe he was the one who started and pastored the church. In fact, he may have started a few

churches in that area. Laodicea and Hierapolis were nearby cities in what was called the Lycus Valley, and Epaphras is praying for all those churches, most likely as their pastor. Most likely, Epaphras is the one who brought concerns about the church to the Apostle Paul, which is why Paul wrote this letter. He's why Paul addresses certain false teachings and emphasizes key doctrines. Epaphras would have had a major influence in the composition of this book.

You can see how much he cares about the Colossians. Paul says he's struggling in prayer for them. It's the Greek word *agonizomai* from which we get agonized. He has agonized in his prayers for the church. He wrestled in prayer for the Colossians.

I thank God for the Christians I have who pray for me. All I have to do is send one text message out and I will have 15-20 Christians praying for me and my family immediately.

Thank God for praying friends. And thank God for,

#### **Point #7-Skilled Friends: Luke (V.14)**

Verse 14 says, "*Luke the beloved physician greets you.*" This is the Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke and the book Acts—two books that comprise more than 1/3 of the NT. Luke wrote more than Paul.

As Paul says here, Luke was a doctor. He was a skilled and learned man. Scholars look at the opening verses of his gospel (V.1-4) and agree that it is consistent with scientific writings of the time, including writings in the field of medicine.

But he left what would have been a promising career in medicine to accompany the Apostles, particularly Paul. Three times in the book of Acts the narrator changes the language from "they" to "we"—indicating that Luke was with the Apostles on their journeys.

Tradition says "he had neither wife nor children. He was undistracted in his devotion to the Lord" and "at the age of 84 he fell asleep, fully of the Holy Spirit."

We know he was the only one with Paul at the end of his life. In his final letter Paul says, "Luke alone is with me." (2nd Timothy 4:11). Since we know Paul didn't pen his own letters (he used a secretary), Luke is probably the one who penned 2nd Timothy. This was a skillful and useful man. Those are good friends to have around.

I've been amazed at the skills people in our church have. One of the great benefits of being connected to a local church is the vast amount of resources you will find in the people. There are skills and talents in this room in abundance. That's a blessing from God. He equips His people to serve one another in a multitude of ways.

Finally, though you don't want it, you will have:

**Point #8-Heartbreaking Friends: Demas (V.14)**

That brings us to Demas in verse 14. Demas appears here, in Philemon 24 and in Paul's final letter to Timothy. Like the other men in his chapter, Demas was at one time a loyal friend and useful ministry partner to Paul. He wasn't just another church member. He was a leader and apparently an influential person because Paul expects the Colossians to know him.

No doubt, there was a time when Demas did much good for Paul in the ministry, but he later abandoned him. 2 Tim. 4:9-10, 9 *"Do your best to come to me soon. 10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."* Whether or not Demas left the faith completely, we can't be sure. It's possible. What we do know is that he deserted Paul during his final hours. In that letter, Paul is about to be executed, and Demas left his side. Maybe he didn't want to suffer the same fate.

One thing I do know is that in ministry, you will have some disappointments and even heartbreaking moments. And the greatest pain you will experience will come by hands of those you love.

Time will not permit me to talk about the heartbreak my wife and I have endured from people who once called us their friends; people who invited us into their homes. We baptized and married their children, we buried their loved ones, we had them in our home...only to see them become our enemies.

That brings us to the final kind of friend we need.

**Point #9-Influential Friends: Paul (V.15-18)**

We need leaders who drive us. That brings us to Paul. Paul was a leader to all these men. 15, *"Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house."* The churches would have been happy to hear greetings from Paul's friends, but they were especially encouraged to receive greetings from Paul himself.

*Paul also held them accountable. 16, “And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.”*

Paul is holding them accountable to not only read this letter and learn his doctrine, they are to read the letter from Laodicea. Now, it's not clear which letter he's referring to here. It could be a letter the Laodiceans wrote to Paul or a lost letter he wrote to them. It could also be the book of Ephesians, which is most likely. The book of Ephesians was originally a general letter written with no audience. One manuscript was found in the book with the name Ephesus on it. All the other manuscripts give no indication who it was for. What matters is that Paul is ensuring their spiritual growth by learning his teachings.

He also pushed people at times. Verse 17, *“And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”* We have no idea what Archippus was supposed to do. Doesn't matter. What's important is that sometimes people need encouragement to fulfill the ministry, and Paul was good at giving people a little nudge.

Finally, we need friends that inspire us. Paul's relentless attitude and willingness to suffer for Christ would have energized the churches to serve. Verse 18 Paul closes the letter, *“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.”*

## **Application**

I have told you what kind of friends you need, let me close by telling why you need good Christian friends.

### **#1-Friends will help you fight sin**

As a Christian you should be fighting sin, and you can do so through prayer, Scripture and worship, but you also need Christian friends. Fellow believers can help you suppress sin in your life unlike any other spiritual discipline. You can confess sins to one another and discuss how to gain victory. If you're fighting sin alone, you're like a soldier in the battlefield alone.

### **#2-Friends will refresh you spiritually**

In 1 Corinthians 16:17–18, Paul says that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus *“refreshed my spirit.”* I am an introvert by nature, but I need people around at times to be energized and refreshed.

You can ask Pastor Brady. When I need a break at work, I will come to his office and bother him. Just 5 minutes with him refreshes me for work and life.

### **#3-Friends will give you wise counsel**

We're really good at telling others what to do, but we're not so good at taking our own advice. We need friends who can give wise counsel. Proverbs 27:9, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel."

The other night I texted Pastor Nick and said, I need you to pastor me for a minute. I told him what I was going through, and he helped me. He gave me wise and sound counsel.

### **#4-Friends will tell you truth**

We need people who will speak the truth to us even when it hurts. Good Christian friends will do that. They'll be honest with you when you need correction and the right perspective. Proverbs 27:6, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."

We've looked at encouraging friends, trustworthy friends, faithful friends, and the rest...but the most important friend you can have above all else is a heavenly friend.

In Scripture God calls us His friends. Abraham was called the friend of God. In Isaiah 41:8, the Lord says the descendants of Abraham are His friend. In John 15, Jesus told His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends."

And, of course, the greatest word on this subject is when Jesus said, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13). Jesus is a friend to His people. He laid down His life for His friends. He embodied what true friendship is in His love and sacrifice. We need his friendship above anyone else. But the amazing thing is this, I experience the friendship of Jesus through my friends at church. His love, encouragement, and faithfulness come through them.

I meant it when I said my friends at TJC gave me back my love of pastoring. I would go as far to say this...Jesus saved my soul, but my friends at TJC saved my ministry.

## QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who are some of your best friends? What is it about them that makes them such good friends?
- 2) How did the people Paul mentions in these verses bring him comfort?
- 3) Why do we need Christian friends in our lives (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Proverbs 13:20, 27:17)?
- 4) Do you have a variety of friends like Paul had or do you tend to be around the same type of people? Why is it important to have variety?
- 5) How can you be a better friend to other Christians and leaders in your church (John 15:13, Proverbs 17:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24-25)?
- 6) Ministry in the church is a team effort. It isn't just up to the pastors/elders or leaders in the church to do this work. It's up to everyone who is a part of the body. What are some ways you can be more involved in ministry work? What might more involvement in ministry require of you or require that you give up?
- 7) Having a lot of Christian friends is a blessing but who should ultimately be our best friend (John 15:13-15, 1 John 3:16, Romans 5:8)?
- 8) What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned this summer from the book of Colossians?