

Christ-Centered Ministry Teams

Colossians 4:7-18 - NCBC, Nov 22, 2015

Main Point: **God transforms ordinary people to work together for His extraordinary purposes.**

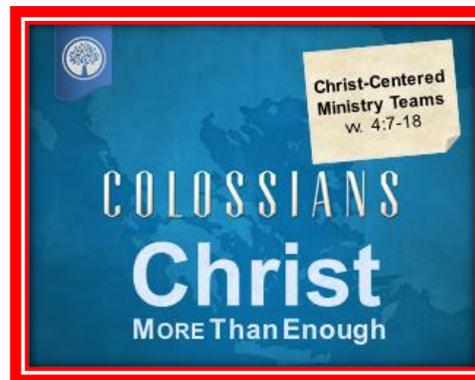
- **The blessing of multipliers** (v.7-9)
 - Tychicus the trusted assistant
 - Onesmius the runaway slave
- **The blessing of encouragers** (v.10-11, 14a)
 - Aristarchus the devoted companion
 - Mark the recovered friend
 - Jesus Justus the unsung hero
 - Luke the talented specialist
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- **The blessing of prayer-warriors** (v.12-13)
 - Epaphras the prayer warrior
- **The reality of brokenness** (v.14b)
 - Demas the worldly defector
- **The blessing of extended partnerships** (v.15-18)
 - Nympha the church hostess
 - Archippus the pastor
 - The Laodiceans

Application: **Don't be a spiritual lone-ranger but connect with a ministry team for God's glory and your joy.**

Opening Announcements:

Missions Report – Pam King

<<This I Believe>>



This morning we will finish our verse by verse study of Colossians. I trust that this study has been helpful to you as we've been refreshed with the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Christ is more than enough.

Please open your Bible to **Colossians chapter 4.**

If you do not have a Bible with you today, we'd love to give you one. Please catch the attention of the ushers as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible to use this morning. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Our text in Colossians 4 is found on page **985** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand with me now in

honor of God's Word as I read from **Colossians 4:7**, reading from the **English Standard Version**:

Colossians 4:7-18 *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, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, 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. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 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. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.*

This is the word of our Lord. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

What comes to mind when you hear the words, “Lone Ranger?” Perhaps it's the “William Tell Overture” or the words, “Hi Ho Silver Away!” Or perhaps you think of the hero's trusty Indian friend named Tonto – who would faithfully help the Lone Texas Ranger defeat the bad guys in each thrilling episode of *The Lone Ranger*.

Isn't it ironic that even the masked lawman we call the Lone Ranger needed a trusted friend working alongside him?

God designed every one of us to be in community with others. Without partnering together with others, it is impossible for us to fully reflect the image of a triune God through our lives. This is one of the reasons God places every rescued person into His family – the church. God intends for all of His children to be sharing life and burdens and ministry together. And that's exactly what we observe in the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Colossians this morning.

In the 4th chapter, we are called to be diligent in prayer and evangelism. Since Christ is our life, then our life's mission must be to seek opportunities to clearly tell others of the person and work of Jesus Christ so that they might be saved and rescued from their sin. But praise God, we are not on this mission alone! Every believer is part of a ministry team – and in these last verses of this chapter Paul highlights his own ministry team in this “Christmas Card from a Roman Prison.”

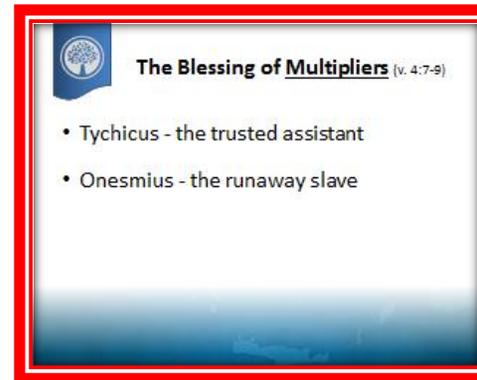
So this morning we learn from 'normal' heroes...for we are reminded that **God transforms ordinary people to work together for His extraordinary purposes.**



None of us serve Jesus Christ alone. We need the prayers and encouragement of other believers. Prayer and community empower ordinary believers to serve Christ as a team with extraordinary results!

Now this morning is not a pastoral rant about how everyone should be volunteering in the church. Rather, we are just going to make some observations about Paul's ministry team, and consider what lessons we might learn for our own lives this morning.

Let's first meet Tychicus and Onesimus as we consider **the blessing of multipliers** on a Christ-centered Ministry team. (v.7-9)



Multipliers are people around you who make you better. People who help you and your ministry influence reach farther than you could reach alone.

Here Paul is sending Tychicus and Onesimus to Colossae where he could not go himself. His imprisonment in Rome limited his own ability to minister to the church in Colossae. These friends multiplied Paul's ministry influence to others.

We meet **Tychicus the trusted assistant** 5 times in the New Testament. Every time he's assisting Paul, making things happen behind the scenes, helping multiply his influence and ministry for the sake of Christ.

In **Acts 20:4**, we discover that Tychicus was sacrificially traveling with Paul to collect funds for the church in Jerusalem. We know from Scripture that Tychicus carried Paul's letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Corinthians to the churches.¹ And when

¹ Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 2 Cor 8:16-24

Paul was approaching death and unable to travel, it was Tychicus that he sent in his place to give necessary pastoral care to the church in Crete (Tit 3:12) and Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12). These were great responsibilities that required much personal hardship, and yet Tychicus made things happen. He's like Pastor Denny on our staff team here at New Castle. I just mention an idea, and before I know it... it happens! What a blessing!

From verse 7 we know Paul dearly loved Tychicus. He was a trusted minister. A co-slave of Jesus Christ.

How encouraging to be united with fellow believers who are committed to doing the right thing – not just the easy thing – to help us in our mutual mission of proclaiming Christ to the world!

In verse 9 Paul also called Onesimus “*a faithful and beloved brother*” – precious words to represent a dear friendship forged in the fire of experience and appreciation.

Remember **Onesimus was a runaway slave**. And it was personal to the church in Colossae. The Colossian church met in the home of Philemon – his former slave master! And everyone knew what this local boy had done in stealing from and running away from Philemon.

But as God would have it... Onesimus had become converted by God's grace under Paul's ministry in Rome...and now the runaway slave had become a dear brother...and Paul was sending him back to be received and welcomed as any other brother in Christ.

Church don't miss this – when a person comes to faith in Christ – the past is no longer the issue. Old things pass away – behold all things are made new! (2 Cor 5:17)
Christ-centered ministry teams are built on the credentials of present faith and repentance more than past history.

So no matter who you are or what you have done in your life – Christ's arms of forgiveness and welcome acceptance are open to you this morning! Take hope from the lifestory of Onesimus – and find peace and purpose again in Jesus Christ!

And as we see in verse 8, multipliers encourage and cheer others up – by sharing the stories of how God is working in and through others on the team.

In effect – Paul is saying – I'm sending Tychicus and Onesimus to you to deliver my letters, and give you a missions update from Rome. Similar to modern prayer letters that we receive from our missionaries today – Paul wasn't being selfish or bragging – but sincerely wanted them to know how it was going with him so that his supporting churches would know how to best support him in prayer.

Who helps multiply the influence of your words or personal holiness to reach farther and grow deeper than you could do without them? Are you thankful for the blessing of working together with other ordinary people whom God has transformed for His extraordinary purposes?

In verses 10-11, and the beginning of verse 14, we meet 3 Messianic Jews, and 1 converted Gentile – all who were a great comfort to Paul. For every Christ-centered ministry team knows **the blessing of encouragers (v.10-11, 14a)**.



Aristarchus was Paul's devoted companion. He was a Jewish believer with a Greek name. He stood by Paul through thick and thin. In **Acts 27**, he was shipwrecked with Paul. In **Acts 19** he was seized along with Paul by an angry mob. And here in verse 10 when Paul uses the words "*fellow prisoner*" – it likely means that Aristarchus shared Paul's imprisonment voluntarily – so that he could be a help and a comfort to him in the midst of his distress.

Here was a friend who sticks closer than a brother (**Prov 18:24**). Adversity did not lessen his affection or commitment alongside his ministry teammate.

And then there was **Mark the recovered friend**. What grace is represented by Paul's appreciation of Mark on his ministry team. For in **Acts 13:13**, we learn that Mark deserted Paul during their first missionary journey. He ran when the going got tough.

But don't miss the joyful truth of Paul's instructions to the Colossian church now years after that ministry failure – Mark was now restored! **1 Peter 5:13** hints that perhaps the apostle Peter – who was no stranger to ministry failure himself – was used by God to restore Mark, and help him gain a second chance at ministry.

Have you ever failed in ministry?

Listen my friends. John Mark is an encouragement to every person who has ever failed in his first attempts to serve God. Mark did not sit around and sulk. He got back into ministry and proved himself faithful to the Lord and to the Apostle Paul. Loved ones - God makes Christ-centered ministry teams out of past failures – so all the glory goes to Christ and not to us!

And then Paul speaks of being encouraged and comforted by **Jesus Justus the unsung hero**. This is the only verse in the Bible that speaks of this encourager who had a Jewish first name (Jesus), and a Roman last name (Justus).

God delights in taking simple no-names like us — ordinary normal people – and making us – what does verse 11 say,

Fellow workers for the kingdom of God.

No matter how invisible your gospel ministry may be to others – God desires you to contribute to the growth of His kingdom as you faithfully and humbly employ your gifts and walk in obedience to Christ.

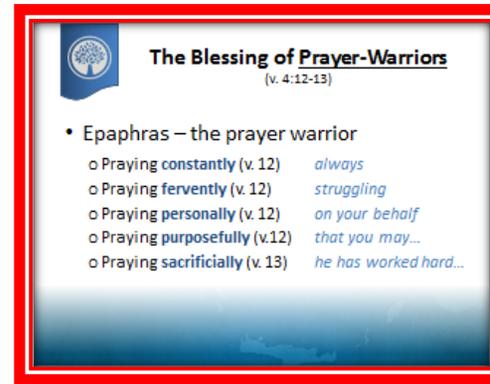
Are you an encourager? Whether in highly visible ways like Aristarchus, or completely behind the scenes like Jesus Justus?

Or are you an encourager like the Gentile **Luke who was a talented specialist?**

In verse 14, Luke is called Paul's *beloved physician*. This dear member of Paul's ministry team had a significant role in the early church. As far as we know, he never married but served the Lord without distraction as a skillful physician, careful historian, and beloved friend to Paul until death. Isn't it fascinating to note that while God gave Paul the authority to heal people in His Name, Paul traveled with a physician. Ordinary people – working together to do extraordinary things – all by God's grace!

So do you know the comfort and encouragement that comes with serving faithfully alongside other brothers and sisters who stay with you through the thick and thin of Christ-centered ministry?

In verses 12-13, we meet **Epaphras the prayer warrior**, and we consider the important **blessing of partnering with prayer-warriors** in our earthly ministry. (v.12-13)



Remember we met Epaphras in **chapter 1, verse 7** of Colossians, where Paul calls him his “*fellow-servant.*” Epaphras was not just a solitary servant of Christ – he was a *fellow*-servant together with Paul and others. **He believed in the local church, and he purposefully connected himself to work with other Christians.** He was the home missionary that had founded the church in Colossae. More than likely, he had also founded the churches in the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 4:13).

But here in verses 12-13, we learn that one of the greatest contributions from Epaphras to the ministry-team – prayer. And he didn't just pray when he felt like it...but Epaphras was “*always struggling on your behalf in his prayers.*”

The word struggle here means “agonizing.” Epaphras was intensely engaged in a struggle against strong opposition – through his prayers. Consider what spiritual fruit of repentance and worship could be accomplished

by our ministry teams if we had members who prayed like Epaphras.

Epaphras was just an ordinary man...who prayed for God to do extraordinary things.

Look again at Epaphras' specific requests in verse 12,

That the believers in the three neighboring cities of Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis would **1) stand mature**, and **2) be fully assured in all the will of God**.

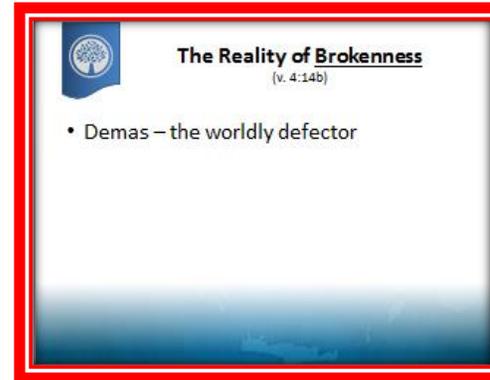
Epaphras knew that the spiritual maturity of the believers back in his church plants depended upon the active grace of God in their lives. And so he prayed that they would stand mature – fully convinced of the Gospel so that they would not shift their hope from its truth and be carried away by any false teaching.

Paul witnessed how hard Epaphras labored in prayer. So let's labor sacrificially with zeal in our prayers as well. May our prayers be full of zeal, emotion, energy, and concern.

Muted indifference, coolness, and dullness have no place for the Christian minister's prayers...and haven't we all been made ambassadors for Christ? **Christ-centered ministry teams depend on God for all the outcomes and results of their ministry** – and thus prayer-warriors are urgently needed.

The end of verse 14 drives our dependence home – for in reality, all Christ-centered ministry teams are filled with

brokenness. **The reality of brokenness (v.14b)** is shown in the Apostle Paul's team through the person of Demas.



Demas is only mentioned 3 times in Paul's letters and his story is a sad one. Initially from this passage and from **Philemon 24**, we see that Demas is a supportive member of Paul's ministry team. But in **2 Timothy 4:10** Paul writes that Demas deserted him ...because of his love for this present world.

Demas was the worldly defector. He tried to serve 2 masters, but eventually the religious veneer wore off and his true colors were exposed.

Loved ones – you don't have to serve in Christian ministry very long before you will encounter betrayal or disappointment from someone on your team. It's heartbreaking...but think about it. Even Jesus' earthly ministry team of his 12 disciples had a defector – Judas Iscariot. And Jesus taught the parable of the Sower to remind us that many will make what seems to be a good

beginning in Christ only to succumb to worldliness in the end.

So let anyone who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall (1 Cor 10:12). Christ-centered ministry teams understand this real and present danger, and thus take effort to care for one another, pursue authentic accountability, walk in the light with their own sins, and watch their own lives and doctrine closely.

But never use the failures of others as an excuse to back away from ministry yourself. Remember Mark & Peter – perhaps God will eventually restore your friends back to Gospel ministry someday. But even if they are like Demas and never restored back from the world – the mission of Christ must go on.

And so Paul concludes his letter to the Colossians with final greetings, rejoicing in the **blessing of extended partnerships (v.15-18)**.



I take great joy in the fact that Paul delighted in his Christ-centered relationships with people he had never met personally. Like all Christ-centered ministry teams, there is a great joy whenever we are able to work together with other believers in extended partnerships for Christ's sake.

So after he shares his commendation and greetings from his own ministry team, he addresses the believers at Laodicea and **Nympha the church hostess**. While the gender of Nympha is not certain, it seems like this was an ordinary Laodicean woman whose ministry was to provide a physical meeting place for the new believers to gather and be encouraged in their reading of Scripture, prayers, and worship of Jesus Christ.

Then Paul encouraged all **the Laodicean** believers to read the Colossian letter as well. In short, **Paul's great concern was that the Word of God be read and studied in these churches.**

Now of course we don't have a copy of the Laodicean letter today. This letter has been lost, and is not a part of inspired Scripture that God has preserved for us to learn from today. But what God has given us we do well to pay close attention to – for all Christ-centered ministry teams govern their partnerships by the authority of God's Word, and not the pragmatic popularity of the world.

Finally before closing the letter, Paul gives specific encouragement to **Archippus the pastor**.

It seems that Archippus was the interim pastor of the Colossian church in Epaphras' absence. And as such, he likely lived in Philemon's home and may have even been the son of Philemon and Apphia (Philemon 2).

So after writing all four chapters stocked full of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ – Paul wants Archippus to get the message clearly – stay the course. Don't give in to the false teachers! Fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord!

This provides a couple of important reminder for all Christ-centered ministry teams this morning. First, **remember the burdens of spiritual leaders in your ministry – and seek to encourage them often.** Local church pastors/elders often face many problems and carry many burdens – and can benefit tremendously from your encouragement.

But second, **remember that ministry is not something we do for God; it is something God does in and through us by the power of His Holy Spirit!** Archippus, and all Christ-centered ministry partners – are stewards of God who will one day have to give an account for our work.

No wonder his final words are “God's Grace Be With You.” For all Christ-centered ministry is only accomplished through the sovereign and transforming grace of God.

So then let me urge us all this morning - **Don't be a spiritual lone-ranger connect with a ministry team for God's glory and your joy.**



After reading this letter from the imprisoned Paul to the Colossian church – we cannot help but realize that **Jesus Christ has provided to us everything that we can ever want or need!** All of God's fullness is in Jesus Christ, and we have been made complete in Him!

Christ is more than enough for us! For our salvation. For our forgiveness from sin. For our peace. For our wisdom. For our homes, our workplaces, and all our personal relationships. And Christ is enough for us when it comes to our ministry as well.

So don't approach your ministry as if you are a lone-ranger. Don't miss out on the messy blessings of knowing others, and being known – all in the trenches of ministry here in our local communities.

1 Corinthians 12:7 is clear,

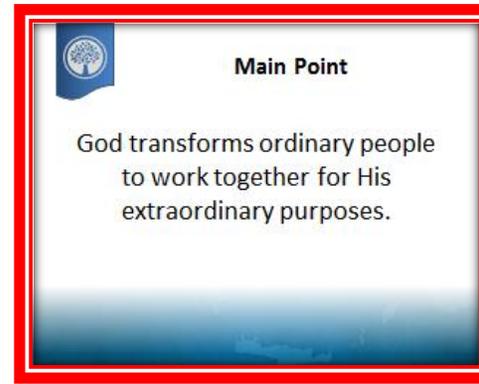
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Translation – God’s Spirit gives every believer a supernatural gifting – an ability to serve or speak for Christ that is empowered by His Spirit – so that every time you speak or serve in that way ... the entire team is edified and built up.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. It doesn’t matter if you’ve failed in the past, or are losing heart in the present. God’s team doesn’t have bench warmers – but God Himself is the power and wisdom and the righteousness that we need. Christ is enough for us church.

Do you believe this?

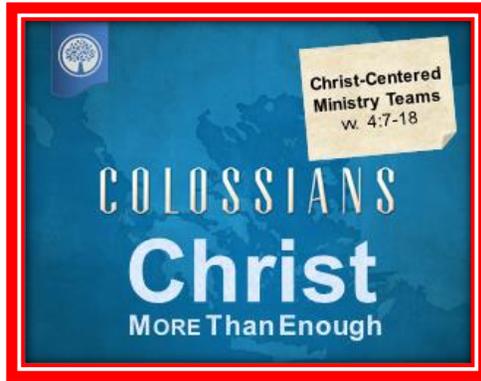
If so, I pray you will recommit with me this morning to actively fulfill your ministry role that God has supernaturally empowered you for in a specific ministry team in your local church. And if you are not yet connected with a Christ-centered ministry team, there’s opportunities for you to plug in and get connected today.

On the back of your sermon notes’ page this morning, we’ve provided a list of the Top 10 Ministry Opportunities currently available to you here at New Castle Bible Church. But of course, the Spirit’s work here among us is not limited to just these specific opportunities. So reach out with an email this week – and let us help connect you to God’s joy as you experience the many blessings of being part of a Christ-centered ministry team.



This morning we’ve learned from the examples of a lot of ordinary people. Ordinary people that God transformed... so that as they worked together on mission for God – He was able to supernaturally accomplish extraordinary purposes for the sake of His kingdom in this world.

Never sell God’s power short. Jesus is able to save you from your sins. Believe on Him today – cry out to Him, and you will be saved. And then as you are welcomed and accepted by His grace, may you fulfill the ministry which you have received from Him – the ministry of proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and preparing His people to worship Him forever.



Next week Pastor Somers is coming to preach and feed us richly from God's Word. Then the following week we will study the short letter of Philemon, before we begin a series of Advent messages. So go enjoy this week of Thanksgiving festivities, and remember to be thankful most of all – that Jesus Christ is more than enough for us!

Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**

Closing Song – << >>

Jude 24-25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*