

Christ In Our Friendships

Colossians 4:7-18

Pastor John Miller

I probably shouldn't do it but I'm going to read the whole text because I want you to see it just in one setting and get the full reading, and then we're going to go back and look at these individuals that surrounded Paul the apostle. Beginning in Colossians 4:7, Paul says, "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: 8 Whom I have sent unto you"—speaking to the believers in Colossae—"for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;"—he says I'm going to send him—"With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother;"—I love that—"who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here." Again, Paul's writing from prison. He wants them to know how he's doing, and he wants to hear how they are doing in Colossae.

Verse 10, "Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) 11 And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision,"—they're Jews. "These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. 15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. 16 And when this epistle"—this letter—"is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, Take heed"—or beware—"to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it. 18 The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen."

In the book of Colossians we've seen "Christ's Preeminence." That is the theme of Colossians. If you want a book of the Bible that sets forth the glory and the deity and the majesty and the sufficiency of Christ, Colossians is your book. Another great Christ-exalting book is the book of Hebrews. Those are both books in the New Testament that exalt the Person of Jesus Christ. Taking that theme that we find in the book of Colossians, "Christ's Preeminence," and by the way the word "preeminent" means no one higher, no one higher than Christ—not prominence, which is importance, but preeminence which means that He is the highest One.

We saw in chapter 1, just to rehearse real quickly, Christ's preeminence declared, and we just studied that deep, doctrinal section of chapter 1 on the preeminence of Christ declared. In chapter 2, we saw Christ's preeminence defended, and in that section he's dealing with Christ's preeminence as opposed to the false teaching of the gnostic heresy that had infiltrated the church in Colossae. In chapters 3 and 4, Christ's preeminence demonstrated, we moved there from the doctrine to the duty, from the principles to the practice. He put Christianity in shoe

leather. As we come to the conclusion of this epistle from verses 7-18, Paul just basically greets or salutes or commends a group of individuals that were friends of his and people in the church there in Colossae and also in Laodicea, which is in the Hierapolis valley where Colossae sat.

Now, we come to the end of our study in Colossians, and we find that Paul was not only a great soul winner but he was a great friend maker. We don't often think about that, but in the book of Romans, which is the greatest theological treatise that Paul ever wrote, he comes to chapter 16 and greets all these people by name in Rome, and he'd never been to Rome. Paul had never actually gotten to Rome, yet he knew all these people in Rome. Even though he was a great soul winner, he was also a great friend maker.

It's so important as a believer to have friends in Christ. Amen? People that can pick you up when you're down, and people that you can pick up when they are down. Write down Ecclesiastes 4:9-10. It says, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." It's so important to have Christian friends when you stumble to lift you up and when others stumble for you to lift them up. Even Jesus had twelve disciples, and He had three in the inner circle—Peter, James, and John—and He called them friends. He also was friends with Mary and Martha and Lazarus. I love the relationship between them and the times He would spend in their home together. Of course, Martha would serve and Mary would sit at His feet, and He and Lazarus would talk. Even the Son of God had that human need for friendship and companionship and for deep fellowship. So, it's interesting.

In Acts and the epistles we find more than 100 people named that are surrounding the life of Paul the apostle, but here in Colossians 4:7-18, we're going to look at ten individuals. We can't tarry on them, but they're interesting to look at in the relationship they had with Paul and some lessons that we can learn about bringing Christ's fullness and Christ's preeminence into our friendships.

The first thing we see is the friends that Paul sent, verses 7-9. Let's look at it again. He says, "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: 8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;"—so, I'm sending him to you so I can find out how you're doing, you can hear how I'm doing, and he might bring comfort to your hearts; and he's going to come—here he is—verse 9, "With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you,"—he was from Colossae. "They shall make known unto you all things which are done here."

Let's look at these two individuals. They were basically two representatives that Paul was sending from Rome. Remember, Paul's writing these words in Rome in jail. When we say, "in jail," or in prison or so forth, he was under house arrest. There are two basic imprisonments of Paul in Rome. The first one was for religious reasons when the Jews opposed him in

Jerusalem and he appealed to Caesar, so he was able to have the liberty of renting his own house, chained to a Roman soldier, but friends could come to him and he could be with them and he could write this letter and could pray and continue to do his ministry, but he was in Rome in chains under house arrest.

The first person that he mentions here, the two, is Tychicus. Some pronounce this, tack-it-tus, I'm going to go with Tychicus. You can go with whatever you want when you read these names. They're a challenge. "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord." His name means fortunate, so maybe you'll want to name your dog, Tychicus, fortunate, and he gets to have a master like you and take care of you. I don't think that I would want to have one of my grandsons named Tychicus. Anyway, that's his name. It means fortunate.

Tychicus accompanied Paul on the third missionary journey, so he traveled with Paul and was now with Paul in Rome in a prison. By the way, lest I forget, it was very dangerous for Paul to be in prison and have people come see him because they could've also been suspect by the Roman government and arrested as well, especially at his second imprisonment when he wrote 2 Timothy and he was now a political prisoner, and it was much more dangerous. He was with Paul on his third missionary journey and now with him in Rome. He was the person who delivered the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul gave the letters to Tychicus, and he carried them.

Now, you talk about snail mail. You would take a letter and you would get someone to carry it by hand. It would take weeks, sometimes months, to get that letter delivered. I remember the first time I heard about e-mails and communicating over the internet. I was actually on a trip to Moscow, Russia. I was in Moscow, and the missionary said, "Check this out," and on the computer they were talking with people in California. I'm, to this day, still computer illiterate. I don't know anything about computers, but it was just blowing my mind that you could instantly communicate like that. How crazy it is in this ancient world that Paul lived in—you write a letter, you hand it to somebody, and they have to journey...arduous, difficult journey by foot, by sea, for a long time to be able to carry that letter. So, when you get to heaven, give Tychicus a big handshake and tell him, "Thank you for faithfully delivering the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon."

You can imagine as he's going over that territory carrying this letter, he might've been thinking, How did I get stuck with this job? Why do I have to do this? They always give me the lousy jobs, the bad jobs. This is not fair. Little did he realize the magnitude of the effect that he would have by safely delivering that letter. It would ultimately be copied into other copies. They didn't have printing machines. They didn't have books in those days, but think of the blessing that was in his hands as he faithfully traveled and delivered that letter and was unaware of the magnitude of impact that his ministry of carrying that letter would have on the world and on the body of Christ in the strengthening in the church.

Never, ever despise the day of small things. Never dismiss what God gives you to do as being

unimportant. You never know how God can turn things around and use things for His glory. Someone said, “Big doors swing on small hinges.” I love that. You may think, I’m a little small hinge, but God can swing open a large door, and He can do marvelous things with just the smallest service that we render to the Lord.

What does Paul say about this brother’s character? Let’s break it down, verse 7. He’s called, “. . . a beloved brother.” He’s a Christian. He’s a brother in Christ. You know, our deepest friendships are those that are in the Lord. We all know as believers that we had friends in our unbelieving days, our unsaved days, and they didn’t last very long. There was always conflict and issues, and they would eventually break up and go their separate ways. But, I know for me, after I became a Christian, the friendships that the Lord brought into my life have lasted all these many years as I’ve walked with the Lord, and even though they’ve gone different directions, gone different places, we’re brothers in Christ and we have that excitement of being part of the family of God and that one day we’ll be in heaven together forever. Amen? So, our deepest friendships are in the Lord. If you’re a believer, it doesn’t mean you can’t be a friend of an unbeliever, but how can you be a deep, close, intimate friend with somebody who is not a child of God and has different values, different world view. We should love the world, we should reach out to the world, we shouldn’t live in isolation of the world, but deep friendships come from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the book of Amos 3:3 it says, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” I know that when I got saved that all my unsaved friends just kind of went their way, kind of dropped off and went different directions, and God brought Christian friends into my life, and how thankful I am even to this day for that.

Notice, not only was Tychicus, “. . . a beloved brother,” he was also, “a faithful minister,” of Christ, verse 7. He served Paul, and it says minister in the word. In the Greek it’s *diákonos*. Weymouth says a trustworthy assistant. He was actually serving the Lord by serving Paul. He was a trustworthy assistant. He was dependable, and that’s what that word conveys, that he was actually a dependable servant of the Lord. Our greatest ability is dependability. If you wanted to have some really good friends, look for friends who have a desire to serve the Lord. Look for people who love the Lord, and not just love the Lord but want to serve the Lord.

Again, I’m so thankful that at an early age as I came to Christ, God brought other men into my life that had a heart for service and a heart to serve the Lord, and that was infectious for me. It helped me to want to be used by God as well. In Proverbs 25:19, it says, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.” I love that. You don’t want to put confidence in someone that’s not faithful in serving the Lord.

Thirdly, notice Tychicus was a, “. . . fellowservant in the Lord.” First, he was, “. . . a beloved brother;” secondly, he was, “. . . a faithful minister;” third, he was, “. . . fellowservant in the Lord.” Again, this is *doûlos* or bondsman. So, he was a *diákonos* serving Paul, he was a bondsman serving the Lord Jesus Christ—again, friends who serve the Lord together.

Now, I could give you a whole list but one of them in my life was my good friend Pastor Skip Heitzig from Calvary of Albuquerque in New Mexico. We were close to the same age. God brought us together right after we both got saved, and we prayed together, studied together, iron sharpened iron together, and saw God use us both in such marvelous ways. To this day, it's a friendship we both cherish so greatly. Pray that God will bring into your life this kind of person to encourage you to be a servant of the Lord as well, a bondservant, *doûlos*, of the Lord.

What does Paul commission him to do? Three things. What does he tell this Tychicus to do? First of all, he wanted him to tell the Colossians how he was doing. In other words, he was going to go from Rome to Colossae and then from Colossae back to Rome. He would take the epistle, but he would also take the message of how Paul is doing on to the believers in Colossae. He would tell the Colossians how Paul was doing, verse 7, "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you," he's going to tell you how I'm doing. Again, friends want to know how friends are doing.

Secondly, he was going to find out how the Colossian Christians were doing. Look at verse 8, "Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts," so I sent him to you so he can comfort you and he can come back and report to me to report to the Colossians. He also was going to comfort. I love that word there in verse 8. "Comfort" literally means to strengthen or encourage. He would strengthen them, he would encourage them, he would comfort them. It means to put fresh heart into. So, friends encourage friends. You want friends that encourage you and comfort you. Again, how thankful I have been for people in my life that God brings into my life at just the right time, say just the right thing to encourage me in serving the Lord. Again, only eternity will be able to tell the impact that their comfort and their encouragement had as they came to strengthen my heart, strengthen my hands in the Lord.

I had a dear friend that has gone to be with the Lord in my former church that I pastored. It was just uncanny how he would show up at the church office. He didn't ask for permission to come in, he just would walk into my office. He would always come at a time when I was discouraged or down and fighting discouragement. He would just speak to me encouragement like nothing I've ever experienced before in my life. So many times he would start to pray over me and just begin to weep in the Holy Spirit as he prayed and what comfort came into my heart. Now, I thank God for him, and what a loss I sense when he went to heaven, but I know that I'll be with him again when we get to heaven and we'll rejoice together. What a blessing that will be.

Paul wanted to gather information and to give them comfort or inspiration. Friends seek to serve, strengthen, and encourage each other. If you have a friend, be an encourager. Remember the Old Testament story that we see as a model of friendship between Jonathan and David? Jonathon, of course, was the son of Saul. He was in line to be the king of Israel, but God had called David to be the king, yet Jonathan actually didn't get in the way. Jonathan encouraged David, strengthened David's heart, helped David in God's calling on his life, and they committed to loving each other and serving together. Again, Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Just as iron sharpens

iron, a man sharpens the countenance of his friend, so let's be a Tychicus.

Secondly, verse 9, we have Onesimus. Now, I mentioned him a couple of weeks ago when we talked about slavery in the Bible because Onesimus was a slave who was from Colossae who ran away from his master Philemon. We have the little epistle to Philemon that he brought back to his master. Look at verse 9, Paul says I'm going to send him, "With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here." He was a slave. He ran away from his master, his name was Philemon. It's believed that the church of Colossae met in Philemon's home. He ran away from Colossae to Rome and there encountered Paul the apostle and got saved. I'm making a long story short. I gave it a couple of weeks ago, but kind of cool that this man who was a fugitive, who was a slave, was a dearly beloved brother in Christ. He's a beautiful picture of friendship.

Now, Onesimus is only mentioned twice in the Bible—here in Colossians and in Philemon, verse 9. Notice his character in verse 9. He's called, ". . . a faithful and beloved brother,"—again—"who is one of you," even though he was a runaway slave and had a sinful past. Paul doesn't say he was a bad boy, did some bad things, he was a messed-up dude, stay away from him. No, he's, ". . . a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you." So, friends let friends go. What do I mean by that? Onesimus was in Rome encouraging, helping, serving with Paul, and Paul knew that the right thing to do was to send Onesimus back to Colossae. Instead of being selfish saying, "No, I want you to stay with me. I need you here to help me," he said, "No, I want God's will in your life. I want to encourage you to get right with your master. I want you to do the right thing," so he sent him back. If you're really a friend, you won't be selfish with them, you'll actually encourage them to go and to do the right things in the things that God is calling them to do. Friends help friends to keep and fulfill and do the will of God, and probably Tychicus and Onesimus were carrying the letter to Philemon.

We have a second group of friends in verses 10-14. These are friends who stayed there with Paul in Rome. Now, if you're in prison, and someone wants to hang out with you, that's pretty cool, right? Someone called, "Hey, what're you doing?" "I'm in jail right now." "Hey, I'll be right there. I'm going to hang out there with you." Friends are born for adversity, and a friend should love at all times.

Notice these friends. There's five of them. First is Aristarchus, verse 10, "Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you," so, "The dude that's in jail with me says hi." That's so cool! I'm hanging out here with Aristarchus. He's in jail with me. Now, a little information about this guy. I want to meet him in heaven. He was from Macedonia. Macedonia is northern Greece. If you go to Greece on a map and go north, that northern part of Greece was known as Macedonia. Southern Greece was known as Achaia. When Paul was in Philippi and Thessalonica, northern Greece, he probably led this man to the Lord. He was from Macedonia.

Now, Aristarchus is seen with Paul three times. I know this is kind of a different text to be preaching from, but I find it fascinating, so hang in there. If you're taking notes, write this down. Three times he's appearing in the Bible with Paul. The first is Acts 19 when there was a riot in

Ephesus that broke out. He's seen the first time in the Bible with Paul in a riot. You know, when Paul went into a town, one of two things happened, there was either a revival or there was a riot, and it must've been a riot to hang out with Paul. Aristarchus' mother probably said, "I don't want you hanging out with Paul. He's always in jail or getting in a riot." So, we see him there when the riot broke out with Paul in Ephesus.

The second time he appears with Paul was Acts 27 when Paul was in a shipwreck. You think he's starting to kind of wonder, Do I want to hang out with this guy? Thirdly, is here in Colossae, Colossians 4:10, when Paul was in prison. Isn't that cool? The three times he appears, he's in a riot, he's in a shipwreck, he's in prison. Pick your friends wisely. But I love that. Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." He was a friend with a sympathetic heart. I love that. If you have a friend, suffer with them, spend time with them, connect with them.

Here's the second person who stayed. His name is Marcus or John Mark, verse 10. Paul says, ". . . and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas." This Marcus in verse 10 is better known as John Mark. Now, you've heard of Matthew, then Mark, Luke, and John, right? The four gospels, this is the guy. This is the Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark. What a great guy to hang out with for Paul. His mother was Mary. She had a home in Jerusalem. It is believed, but can't be substantiated for sure, that on the day of Pentecost when the church was gathered in an upper room to pray, that they were in John Mark's home of his mother praying in that upper room when the Holy Spirit fell from heaven. He was a relative of Barnabas, a cousin or a nephew. We can't be clear about whether it's a cousin or a nephew, but he was related to Barnabas.

John Mark took off with Paul on Paul's first missionary journey, and to cut a long story short, about halfway through the missionary trip, the famous story of John Mark was that he left the missionary group and went back home. Now, he's got a bad rap for that, and it may be legitimate, but we don't really know why he went back—some say he got lonely, some say he was a mama's boy, some say he missed home, some say he wanted some good cooking. I don't know. He didn't like sleeping under the stars. Needless to say, he left the missionary group and went back home.

The reason this is significant was because when they were getting ready to go on the second missionary journey, Barnabas, who traveled with Paul who was possibly John Mark's Uncle, said, "Let's take John Mark with me." Do you know what Paul said? "No way, Jose." That's what it says in the Greek. "He flaked on the first trip, he's not going on the second trip." Barnabas said, "He's my nephew. We're taking him." Paul said, "We're not taking him." He said, "We are taking him." And, Barnabas and Paul had an argument. Think about that. These two men of God had a disagreement. What happened was Paul took Silas, and he went one way on his second missionary trip; and Barnabas took John Mark and went a different direction, so there were now two missionary teams instead of one. Whatever the reason for John Mark to leave on the first trip, Paul thought it was a basis for, "I'm not going to use you again. I'm done with you," and I want you to understand that Paul would give him a second chance. So, John Mark redeemed himself in the eyes of Paul.

At the end of Paul's life, in 2 Timothy 4, when Paul is in a dungeon—not a hired house but in a dungeon—waiting to be executed under arrest by the Roman government, he asked that John Mark come to him. He asked that John Mark be sent to him, so John Mark evidently redeemed himself in Paul's eyes.

A lesson there for us that even if your friend may disappoint you or your friend may let you down, there's always room for forgiveness, restoration, and that we can still work together and our friendship can be redeemed as Paul gave John Mark a second opportunity. And, we know that Mark is the author of the second synoptic gospel, the gospel of Mark. So, he redeemed himself.

The third person, verse 11, is Jesus or Justus. His name, first Jesus, and probably as Christianity began to spread and grow, people stopped using that name as much, and he took on the name Justus. We know very little about him other than what's here in this book of Colossians. He was a Jew, and he was with Aristarchus and John Mark. He was a fellow worker. We can't do our work for the Lord alone. He brought comfort to Paul, verse 11. Look at that with me. "And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision,"—so he was Jewish. "These only are my fellowworkers"—so he served with Paul—"unto the kingdom of God,"—and then he says—"which have been a comfort unto me."

That word "comfort" is a medical word in the Greek which means brings relief from pain. It was used for a medicine that brought relief from pain, so he brought comfort and encouragement to Paul the apostle.

Here's the fourth individual that stayed. His name is Epaphras, verses 12-13, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis." In Colossians 1:7, this individual, Epaphras, was called a "fellowservant" and "faithful minister of Christ." Just a footnote is it's believed he was the pastor of the church in Colossae, this man called Epaphras. He says in verse 12, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you." He was their pastor sent by the Colossian church to Paul in Rome to help him and assist him. That's pretty cool when the church of Colossae, which Paul had never been to, loved Paul so much that they wanted to take their pastor and send him to Rome on a mission to comfort Paul. He was the friend who prayed. I want you to look at it.

We all need friends who pray, but how do we pray? Isn't it a blessing when you have a friend that calls you up and says, "Hey, I've been praying for you." I had two friends call me today that said, "You've been on my mind, you've been on my heart, and I'm praying for you." I said, "Thank you. Lord knows I need it." We need prayers of our friends. We need friends that pray for us. I counsel people all the time that are spiritual lone rangers—they have no one to talk to, no one to pray with, no one to pray for them. Get connected to other believers. Get in a small group, get in a prayer group, get in a home group. Get connected with other believers and learn to pray for one another. It's so very, very important.

Since, I believe, he was indeed the pastor of the church at Colossae, we see the job of a pastor to pray for the people of the church. Notice how he prays. Let me break it down to five categories. He prayed consistently, verse 12. He said, “He always prays for you,” so he was consistently praying. We should pray that way for our friends. He was praying fervently. Look at verse 12, “. . . laboring fervently.” He was praying personally for you. He was praying definitely, so we know how he prayed and what he prayed, “. . . that ye might stand perfect”—which means mature, full-grown—“and complete in all the will of God.” This is a great model for how to pray for others, how to pray for your friends, for pastors to pray for their congregants, for the people of his church, “. . . that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” This is a pastor’s heart.

Fifthly, verse 13, he prayed lovingly. Look at verse 13. Paul says, “For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you.” Paul is speaking in verse 13 and saying, “I’m going to testify that I’m with this guy in jail, and he loves you so much that he’s praying constantly for you and has a great zeal for you, and not only for you in Colossae, but those who are in Laodicea, “. . . and them in Hierapolis.” Friends who pray are friends who care. Find friends that pray, be a friend who prays. Only in eternity will we know how much we owe to the prayers of others in our lives.

I see a little bit of humor here, too, by the way Paul speaks of him. He says, “For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you,”—that he prays for you constantly. He probably kept Paul up at night. Probably, in the middle of the night, Epaphras is, “Oh, God! Oh God! Strengthen the Colossians. Help them to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God,” and Paul’s thinking, Can’t we go to bed and sleep right now? Can’t we just pray in the morning? He prayed all the time, probably just overwhelmingly. Paul says, “I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you.”

Here’s the fifth individual that stayed, verse 14. His name is—you’ll recognize this one—“Luke, the beloved physician.” We have the gospel of Matthew, we have Mark, we just met, then we have Luke. This is Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke (we’re studying on Sunday morning) and the book of Acts. He was a Gentile. He was a companion of Paul. He traveled with Paul. Many believe that actually he was given to Paul by a master, he could’ve been a slave though a physician, and it could be that it was Theophilus who he wrote to in the book of Acts and that he gave him to Paul to travel with in order to be his medical doctor. Paul had physical affliction and infirmities, but how cool is that to be traveling in the ancient world as Paul did and travel around and have his own private physician, Dr. Luke—Dr. Luke to take care of him and to watch over him. And then, Dr. Luke to use his gifts and ability in writing and traveling with Paul to write the book of Acts as well as the gospel of Luke. So much, if I’m not mistaken, I could be wrong, I think the majority of the New Testament is written by Luke when you consider Acts and the gospel of Luke combined. It’s more than any other writer.

Luke traveled with Paul. Whenever you’re in the book of Acts and you find what’s called the “we” sections—we went here, we went there, we sailed here—it’s Luke speaking, and he was traveling with Paul who was actually with Paul when he was shipwrecked on the island of Malta and traveled with him to Rome. He used his gifts to help Paul. He stayed with Paul to the very

end. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul says at the end of his life, “Only Luke is with me,” everyone has forsaken me; 2 Timothy 4:16, “At my first answer,”—or, when I stood before the judge—“no man stood with me,”—this is one of the saddest verses in the New Testament—“no man stood with me,”—in the courtroom—“but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.” If you’re in jail, and you gotta go to court, what a blessing to look up and see your good friend Luke smiling and giving you a thumbs up, “I’m praying for you.” He was there to encourage Paul the apostle.

Now, we have one little half a verse for the third, the friend who strayed. Sometimes our friends will disappoint us, verse 14, “. . . and Demas, greet you.” This is the friend that no doubt broke Paul’s heart and disappointed him. Demas is only mentioned three times in Paul’s letter, and the three references tell a sad story, sequentially. First, he’s mentioned in Philemon 1:24 where he says, “. . . Demas . . . my fellowlabourers.” Then, in Colossians 4:14, our text, “. . . and Demas, greet you,” and the third reference is 2 Timothy 4:10, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.” You see the progression? The first time he’s mentioned, “Demas . . . my fellowlabourers,” he served with Paul. Even Paul the apostle had fellow servants that fell away from God or turned away from him in serving the Lord. Then, it’s just, “. . . and Demas, greet you,” and then it’s, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.”

We don’t know what was going on in Demas’ mind or heart or thoughts—why he gave up serving the Lord, why he turned away from the Apostle Paul, why he forsook Paul. It’s interesting. John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress* depicts Demas as forsaking Paul for the love of money. The Bible doesn’t say that, it says he loved this world. The world is described as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, so it could be that his heart was growing cold toward God and that he wanted the things of the world. It could’ve been money. It could’ve been pride. It could’ve been things of the world, the possessions. I don’t know, but sad and tragically, friends can often disappoint us. To have friends, be faithful. The Bible says, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly.”

Sometimes I hear people complain, “I have no friends.” I say, “Well, when you come to church do you say hi to anybody?” “No.” Duh. Why don’t you have friends, “They don’t say hi to me.” “Do you say hi to them?” “No.” “No one shakes my hand.” “Do you shake their hand?” “No.” “No one invites me to hang out with them.” “Do you invite them to hang out with you?” “No.” Do you want a friend? Put a pool in your backyard. If you want a friend, invite them out to dinner and say that you’re paying, you’re buying. “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly,” so if you want friends, be a friend.

Demas disappointed Paul. I’ve had friends disappoint me, and I’m sure that I have disappointed some of my friends from time to time. Friends can and do disappoint us, but what we need to do is always keep our eyes on the Lord. Amen? Don’t be stumbled—here’s the point of application—by a friend who backslides. Don’t be stumbled by a friend who turns away from following Christ. “Well, I’m not going to go to church. I’m not going to pray anymore. I’m not going to read my Bible. I’m not going to be a Christian because I knew this guy who served the Lord, and he fell away,” or did some sinful thing and we get our eyes off of Christ and we get

our eyes on the friend or a person and they stumble us and we're tripped up.

Now, we look at this last group, friends Paul saluted. Again, we won't tarry on them, verses 15-18. The first one is a guy named Nymphas. He's seen in verses 15 and 16 only here in the Bible, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." Again, this is the only place in the Bible this dude appears in Scripture, but he had a church in his house. It's believed that he could've been a pastor of a home church in Laodicea, which is in the area of Colossae, which is known as the area of the Lycus or the valley of Hierapolis. It's just an interesting reference to him, but churches did meet in homes.

The church that I pastored in San Bernardino for many years started in my living room. It started as a home group, grew into a church. It wasn't until the third century that Christians started building church buildings. We think of the church as a building—it's not a building, it's the people. It doesn't matter where we meet. They met in his home, ". . . and the church which is in his house."

Then, there's Archippus. That name is interesting. It means horse ruler, and he was believed to be the son of maybe Philemon, who was the master of Onesimus in Colossae. He was maybe the fill-in pastor for the church in Colossae where Epaphras went into Rome, and he took over the church in Colossae.

Notice three things about this possible interim pastor in Colossae. His ministry was given to him—I love that—verse 17. It says, "Take heed"—or beware—"to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." Be alert, be aware, be watchful. God has entrusted to you a ministry. Make sure that you fulfill it. I think we should all take very seriously that ministry is given to us by God and that we should beware that we take good heed to fulfill what God has called us to do. I don't know of anything more important than if God calls you to ministry—and we're all called to minister in some way—that we are careful to fulfill it. What is it we want to hear when we get to heaven? "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

I'm convinced that when we go to heaven, whatever the circumstances of our death, that we're going to be overwhelmed with our sense of: What did I do with my time? What did I do with my talents? What did I do with my treasures? Was I faithful to the ministry that God called me to? We're going to be really entering eternity with that sense of awareness—did I fulfill what God called me to do and what God entrusted to me? The ministry was given to him, and so he's warned, "Take heed"—to be on guard, watch out—" . . . that thou fulfil it,"—which means complete what God has called you to do, so should we. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul said, "I finished the race. I've run the race. I finished the race." "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown . . . but unto all them also that love his appearing."

In closing, verse 18, the salutation. He salutes in verse 18. He says, "The salutation by the hand of me Paul." What does that mean? It means that Paul took the pen from his secretary. It was actually an amanuensis. He had a secretary who he dictated the letter to and he wrote it

down, but it was all still done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He said, "The salutation by the hand of me Paul." Paul signed all his letters with his own signature to authenticate the epistles that he wrote as an apostle. He asked that they, "Remember my bonds"—remember Paul's writing in jail in house arrest. And, how does he close Colossians? "Grace be with you. Amen."

What a marvelous, marvelous theme to close on the grace of God. It's all about grace. We're saved by grace, Ephesians 2:8-10, we're kept by grace, and grace will lead us home. Don't you love John Newton's Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch; like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

I'm saved by grace, I'm kept by grace, I'm in heaven by God's grace. What begins with grace ends in glory.