

Brothers in Christ

Colossians 4:7-18

Bruce Miller

Last week I invited you to write things for which you were thankful on your Care Cards. I was blessed to read them all and thank God with you. Here are three:

1. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve God in the Children's ministry. I am not worthy.
2. I am thankful for our life group, and the love and friendship.
3. Thankful for God's grace and provision of needs at all times.

I also invited you to give me the names of people for whom you have been praying for years to trust in Christ. I promised to pray for each one by name. You wrote down 440 names. I will treasure praying for each one. I love your heart for people who do not yet know Jesus Christ as Savior. May we pray daily to seize opportunities and salt conversations. We have the privilege of being engaged in Christ's great mission in this world.

Think of people you admire in the church, in your life group. Think of people who are mature in Christ and who are serving Christ. People like that inspire me.

But I have an important question for you. Not everyone is growing spiritually. Why not? Not everyone in this church is serving Christ. Why not? Too often church is like a football game. Bud Wilkerson, former Oklahoma Sooners football coach, was asked if football had contributed anything to the physical fitness of Americans. He replied, "Absolutely nothing. In football, there are 22 people on the field in desperate need of rest. And there are 50,000 people in the stands in desperate need of exercise." In church usually 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work. Are you on the field or are you in the stands? Are you on the active roster or have you benched yourself?

Are you maturing in Christ? Are you actively serving Christ? If so, way to go. If not, why not? Today, God will inspire us with brief profiles of ten active players. Many of these you have never heard of. These ten come from all variety of backgrounds: a slave, a doctor, a minister, a home owner, a

prisoner, Jews and Gentiles. This collage of clips will inspire, convict, motivate and challenge you.

This is the last week of Experiencing Christ, a journey through Colossians. Open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 4. Imagine if your name were in the Bible. What would God write about you if He wrote Colossians chapter 4 about us? If your Life Group leaders were writing about your Life Group, what would they say about you? As we hear these quick clips, consider which player you most identify with or who you most want to be like. Pick one player to emulate.

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. ¹⁰ My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord." ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

I hope you are inspired by these examples to work with your fellow believers for the Lord Christ. Paul's ministry was a team effort. People matter. For Paul the church is more about personal relationships than organizational structure. The believers were bound together by common faith, common mission and authentic love. For relationships to flourish, communication is critical, so Paul wants to know about them and wants them to know about him. In verses 7-9, Paul describes two dear, faithful brothers.

Two dear, faithful brothers

Tychicus and Onesimus were very different and yet are described in almost identical language. Onesimus was a run away slave who had recently turned to Christ. Tychicus was a major player on Paul's team. Both are dear faithful brothers. Tychicus is a

Tychicus – devoted encourager

He is mentioned five times in the New Testament. Paul sent Tychicus to Colossae, Ephesus and Crete. The phrase *faithful brother* echoes back to the start of the letter. Tychicus was a trustworthy, loyal, faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. The phrase “in the Lord” echoes all the references in the book to the Lord. Christ Jesus the Lord is the theme of the book. Paul says Tychicus will “encourage your hearts.” He is an encourager. Some of you regularly encourage me. Terry and Dyna Martin are regular encouragers of my heart. Thank you. This week Frank Breeding took me to lunch. He and his wife Bonnie encourage me nearly every week.

Tychicus left no writings which survived. He was not an apostle. However, God used him as a part of His team. The world may not see our part (rarely does it), but God does, and God says, “I will never forget their works.”

Is this you? Are you a devoted encourager for Christ? Would you like to be? Maybe Tychicus is your primary model. Or perhaps you identify more with Onesimus, our redeemed brother. Read Philemon. It is the back story on Onesimus.

Onesimus – redeemed brother

Onesimus was a testimony to the power of God to transform a life. He was a runaway slave who robbed his master Philemon and fled to Rome where God used Paul to convert him to Christ. This once dishonest man is now a reliable, dearly loved brother. He has been redeemed. The Bible says Onesimus is “one of you,” with a double meaning. He is from Colossae and he is now in Christ, a member of the family of God. God is still in the life-changing business today. Jesus Christ offers to redeem each human being. Maybe you are running away like Onesimus was, but then he met the One who really sets us free, Jesus Christ. If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ, I urge you to do so.

Is this you? Perhaps you have a shameful past and have come to Christ. Christ wants to use you for His mission. Get in the game as a redeemed

brother. Having introduced us to these two faithful brothers, Paul now gives us a glimpse of six fellow workers.

Six fellow workers

Paul conveys greetings from six colleagues in two sets: three Jews and three Gentiles. Christ's team knows no ethnic boundaries. Meet

Aristarchus – fellow prisoner

Aristarchus first appeared during Paul's ministry at Ephesus. He was seized by the rioting mob, who recognized him as one of Paul's companions (Acts 19:29). He accompanied Paul on his return trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) and on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:4).

How was he a prisoner? While this phrase could be metaphoric meaning a spiritual prisoner of Christ, more likely Aristarchus was in prison with Paul. In Rome at times a prisoner could have a friend or slave stay with them. It is possible that Aristarchus was voluntarily sitting in a prison cell to be with Paul. In addition to the obvious physical difficulty and danger, prison was shameful. Aristarchus' example of loyal love is striking.

Is this you? Are you willing to suffer with and for another believer on behalf of Christ? I want to emulate Aristarchus in his willingness to suffer for Christ. The next story touches my heart. Mark, second chance.

Mark – second chance

Onesimus is not the only one who turned a corner. About twelve years before, Mark came from Jerusalem (Acts 12:25) to go on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabus, but Mark left in Pamphylia (15:38). He quit. When Barnabus wanted to take Mark on a second mission (15:37-39), Paul refused, creating a conflict with Barnabus. They went separate ways. Now Mark again serves on Paul's team. He has a second chance. This background helps us understand Paul's surprising instruction for them to welcome Mark. Normally they would of course welcome one of Paul's teammate, but they may have known of the previous conflict, so Paul is now vouching for Mark. They are not to shun him for his previous failure. God uses people who fail. God uses people who once quit. Mark was one of four men privileged to write a gospel of Jesus Christ.

What about you? Have you dropped out of serving Christ? It is time to come back. I welcome you back. We are a church of second chances. Our team is

filled with those who once quit. Failure happens, but failure need not be final. God says those who are forgiven much, love much. Like Mark, we've all had moments when we weren't as faithful and responsible as we could have been. We've all had moments when we have dropped the ball. There is a fumbling, faltering Mark inside each one of us. Our church is a place where you are welcome to come and rebuild your life. There is a place for you in the ministry of this church. Like Mark, you can come back and go on to do great things for the Lord.

We know very little about the next worker but he was a comforter.

Justus – comforter

Justus also sends greetings to the Colossians. He was one of the fellow workers for the Kingdom of God. He brought comfort to Paul. None of us may have a book written about our lives, but if there were one line in the Bible about you, what would it say? Are you a comforter? Maybe Justus can be your hero that you seek to follow. In one of the “thank yous” written on the Care Card last week, one of you said this of a comforter in our church and one of our elders: “I'm thankful for Dave & Jaclyn Bugno who have opened their home & hearts to us for our life group. They have loved us and our kids, and we praise the Lord for them.”

The second list of three fellow workers starts with Epaphras about whom Paul says more than anyone else. This is the man we met in chapter one, verse seven. He brought the gospel to Colossae and brought news about the situation with the Colossian believers to Paul. Epaphras is a

Epaphras – prayer wrestler

Paul vouches for Epaphras that he is working hard for the Colossians and those in the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. It may be that some were criticizing Epaphras and so Paul stood up for him. Epaphras is called a servant of Christ Jesus. Here the name of our Lord is right at the center of our passage. He is the theme of the book, the theme of the universe and should be at the center of our lives. The term for “servant” is more literally “slave,” implying that all of Epaphras' possessions, aspirations, abilities and time are given to Christ and His cause, total commitment.

This slave of Christ Jesus wrestles in prayer. The word for wrestle is from athletics. We saw it earlier in chapter one, verse 29 and chapter two, verse 1, where Paul said he is wrestling or struggling to bring believers to maturity in Christ. Prayer is not passive, but aggressive. The word wrestle is the word

describing Jesus agonizing in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul started the Colossian letter with his model prayer that I have encouraged you to pray and now ends with Epaphras' prayer which comes back to several major themes in the letter.

How about you? Are you a prayer wrestler? Could this phrase be written about you? Would you like it to be? Perhaps Epaphras is your one model to focus on.

Notice what Epaphras prayed for: to stand firm in God's will, be mature and fully convicted, each one echoes themes in the letter.

Stand firm in God's will

Paul opened the letter identifying himself as, "*an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,*" Then he prayed for them, "*asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will*" The will of God is not a mystery, but God's strategy for the salvation of the world. Epaphras is praying that the young church will understand what God is doing and order their lives accordingly, growing into well-grounded Christians who serve Christ.

Mature

In chapter one, verse 28-29, Paul said ²⁸ *We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.* ²⁹ *To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* The word *perfect* in chapter one is the same Greek word as is translated *mature* here in chapter four. Mature is the better translation in both places. God wants us to pray for maturity and struggle to attain it in Christ Jesus. Finally, Epaphras prays for full assurance, full conviction

Fully convicted

Against the false teachers who are undermining sound teaching and creating doubt, Epaphras is praying the believers will be convinced fully; fully assured. Paul said in chapter two verse two that he wants us to have the full riches of complete understanding, to know Christ. It would be great for us to add these three requests to our prayers. This verse, chapter four verse 12 is our final memory verse of this study. Let's say it together:

¹² *Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*

Our next two fellow workers receive little comment.

Luke – beloved partner

Luke is the beloved partner. We know him as the author of a Gospel and the book of Acts. He was a much-loved physician who used his profession to advance Christ's cause.

Is this you? Are you using your profession to advance the cause of Christ? I think of Doctor Lee Brock in our church who has led a Life Group, taught kids in Promiseland, led a small group of middle school boys, served on multiple medical mission trips including ones to China. He uses his gifts to help people on a personal level as well as contributing to Christ's cause financially. I thank God for Dr. Luke and for Dr. Brock. Maybe Luke is your model, to use your profession to advance the cause.

The last of our six is disappointing. Demas, the future deserter.

Demas – future deserter

Demas is the only person in the passage about whom no comment is made. Demas sends greetings, but he is not described as a dear brother or a fellow worker. It may be that Paul already saw signs of what he says later in 2 Timothy 4:10, *for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me*. The pull of the world led Demas to abandon Paul and apparently involvement in Christ's cause. In this moment, it is hard not to think of Ted Haggard, whose love for sins of the flesh drew him away from Christ. And on a more local level, think of the people who may have left your Life Group and that you do not see at church. Do not let this be you. If you are feeling the tug of the world pull you away from Christ, get help. Tell a more mature believer. Be open with your Life Group. Do not be a Demas.

Paul adds two more special people in verses 15-17,

Two special people

a lady in Laodicea and a man in Colossae, Nympha and Archippus. He greets Nympha and the church in her home. She is a generous steward.

Nympha in Laodicea – generous steward

Almost all churches met in private homes for the first two centuries of Christianity 284. Since Nympha is named as the head of the home, she was likely either a widow or unmarried. Her home must have been large enough to accommodate a church service. A typical well-to-do- house could host about thirty to fifty people. Nympha could have been a leader in the church there. At least she acted as host for the gathering.

Could this be written about you? Do you use your home for ministry? Do you host a Life Group in your home? As a lady, do you exercise appropriate leadership? I appreciate Paige Kirkland for facilitating Colossians studies and Erin Botsford for graciously opening her home for Christ’s mission. Maybe Nympha is your model. The last person is

Archippus in Colossae – divine assignment

Here is a surprising and unnerving comment: the church is to tell one person, Archippus, *“See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.”* That could be intimidating. What if I said, “church, be sure and tell Don Closson, one our elders, to complete the work the Lord gave him?” Or if I told the church to all come tell you the same? Is this a warning or a strong encouragement? In either case, there is clear mutual accountability and responsibility. Paul does not hesitate to challenge Archippus to go beyond his current service to Christ. We can easily get out of the game. We get sidetracked. We get exhausted. We get distracted. We get mad and quit. We get frustrated with something and give up. The Bible says, complete your work. It was given to you ultimately not by a human being or an organization, but by the Lord.

How about you? Of these ten profiles which one do you identify with? Which one do you most want to emulate? Pick one as your model. Let their example inspire you to work with your fellow believers for Christ. If you want to get involved someone, we have a Top Ten Serves list of the highest need volunteer positions. Pick one up after the service.

There are models in our own church of people who are growing spiritually and who are serving Christ. Two months ago on September 10th we commissioned Life Group leaders. Today I’ve asked a two leaders to join me

to share about people in their groups who are maturing and serving. It is ok to name names in a positive light. Paul did.

Colossians concludes with the one amazing apostle Paul.

One apostle, Paul: “*Grace be with you.*”

Paul tells the believers to remember his chains. He may have been in manacles. To “*remember*” includes the notion of remembering in prayer. His brief last line, “*grace be with you,*” may be so short because of manacles holding back his hands. From the rest of the letter we know the grace is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with which the letter started in verse one.

The theme of Colossians is the supremacy and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse one, Paul identifies himself with Christ Jesus. Christ is supreme over all. He is the image of the invisible God. The First before all creation; the creator of all; first of all that is; and holds everything together. He is the head of the church; the first of all that will be; He is supreme over all; He is fully God; He reconciles all things by making peace through His bloody cross. How strange if He who is sufficient to sustain a universe, should be insufficient for our lives. How strange if He who is supreme over all that is, should not be supreme in our lives.

Jesus Christ should be more than an accessory in your life, more than a cross worn around your neck. Our whole lives should be for Christ, every word and deed given to make Him supreme.

I pray that our study in Colossians has opened your eyes to see Christ in all His supremacy and sufficiency. He must have supremacy in everything: Supremacy in our families; Supremacy in our marriages; Supremacy in our jobs; Supremacy in our mission and ministry; Supremacy in school; Supremacy in time; Supremacy in love; Supremacy in conversation; Supremacy in pleasures; supremacy in eating; supremacy in play; Supremacy in worship. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Supreme! Let’s make Him supreme in our lives. Do you know Him? Will you live for Him? He is my King!

Responsive reading

Please stand as we affirm with all our hearts the truth and the desires of our hearts from Colossians that we have said aloud together each week.

Leader: *May we live a life worthy of the Lord*
Congregation: *Let us please Him in every way*
Leader: *He is the image of the invisible God*
Congregation: *Let Him be supreme in everything*
Leader: *Be encouraged in heart and united in love*
Congregation: *Let us have the full riches of complete understanding*
Leader: *In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*
Congregation: *Let us know Him fully*

I hope and pray that these affirmations shape our souls. The Lord Jesus Christ is supreme. He reconciles all things. And so He should be supreme in our lives. Christ is not an object to analyze, but the King to worship. He is the key to the meaning of creation, the purpose of life today and the door to life tomorrow. May we be filled to overflowing with Jesus Christ! We cannot think too highly of Christ. Do you know Him? Is He your King? In the second week of our study we saw a video that many have asked to see it again: *That's My King*. I invite you to respond with enthusiasm as we worship our Lord, the King.

Do you know Him? Your life will never be the same after you bow to the King. If you want to know Jesus, tell me on your Care Card. Is He your King? Get in the game, His game. What would Jesus say about you, if you were mentioned at end of a letter like Colossians? We're going to receive an offering for our King. The last two weeks God has blown me away with His generosity through you. We have gone from a deficit to a surplus. You can never out give God. Jesus Christ is our King. He is supreme and He deserves your best gifts. Honor Him with this offering. Put your Care Card in the offering with your financial gift. And as you give to Jesus, I invite you to sing the praises of our one and only Supreme Lord Jesus. There is no one like our King. God has changed me through Colossians. I pray He has changed you. Jesus is sufficient for every need in your life. He is supreme in the universe. Make Him supreme in your life!

© 2006 Bruce B. Miller
McKinney Fellowship Bible Church
2801 Orchid Drive
McKinney, Texas 75070
972-547-7000
www.mcfbc.org

www.brucebmilller.com