

Teammates Needed In Christ's Church

Col 4:12-18

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, May 16, 2021

Household names - 1st name all you need: Magic, Larry, Michael, Kobe. You don't need to hear their last names (Johnson, Bird, Jordan, Bryant). They were super gifted but worked hard and needed support of their team.

Even the best in the world couldn't do it alone, teammates built up were key

- Magic had ... Larry had ... Michael had ... Kobe had ...
- They made their teammates better, encouraged, and challenged
- Each helped teammates be fellow all-stars, some Hall of Famer's
- Less known teammates were key role players in championships:
 - o Kurt, A.C.
 - o Danny, DJ
 - o Steve Kerr, John Paxton, Bill Cartwright
 - o Derek Fisher, Mark Madsden, Mike Penberthy
- If you were a fan cheering them on, you know the other names, too
- At the end, post-game comments by stars give credit to teammates

To Christians, **Paul** is a household name. His 1st name is all you need but his great gifting wasn't all he needed. For years he couldn't do it alone, but key was his teammates. At the end of Col 4, Paul gives credit to his role players. In Paul's mind, these are ministry all-stars, some in the all-time hall of faith. Ultimately it was his owner, God gave victory, but He did it through people. And Paul made his ministry team better, cheering on and challenging them.

As we look at this last part of Paul's letter to the Colossians, it's like a post-game speech. He doesn't say 'hi, mom,' but he does say hi to a woman who was a like a mother to the church that met in her home. Paul's team doctor is part of the picture, like he popped his head in to say 'hi' to his supporters who were cheering them on from home. More than fans, these are faithful followers who knew their names, too. Paul gives shout outs to less-known teammates with key roles, and those on sidelines, in stands or back home. In Col 4:12 he uses a term from athletics to talk about **his team's #1 'booster'**:

¹² ***Epaphras***, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always **struggling [that's the athletic term]** 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.*

Paul had been taken out of the game. More than being benched, he sits in a jail cell chained to a guard. But he doesn't see retirement in God's Word, he's just not able to do all he used to. Even prison didn't stop him, he starts a prison ministry. He couldn't go out (like some watching) but he put letters out to encourage others (like any of you can, letters, email, text, calls, etc.).

Paul lets them know he's rooting for them, that they'll have victory in Jesus.

Paul needed teammates in the church, and so do we. Some by his side, some supporting financially or prayerfully (**Epaphras**). Others ministering from home or opening up their home to the church (**Nympha**), some using their training for the kingdom (**Dr. Luke**), some needing reminder (**Archippus**).

One writer sums up the others in v. 7-11: his unlikely team is 'chosen from all walks of life and from all strata of society... a runaway slave (engaged in ministry [Onesimus]), a **restored backslider** (now full of zeal [**Mark**]... a volunteer willing to suffer for the kingdom [Aristarchus, and v. 11 Justus] represents the "unknowns" in the Lord's service...ordinary people—with nothing particularly special to note about them, who have yet been chosen and given grace to be "fellow workers for the kingdom of God." No matter how "unknown" believers may feel in their own little place, they contribute to the growth of the kingdom when they use their gifts...in obedience'¹

"I'm not an upfront person, or I can't do public speaking or work with kids" (my example of speech class – also as a pastor first time speaking to Jr Hi).
VISITS LAST WEEK: brother who witnesses despite weakness, bad health.
Sister in Christ with losing memory but remembering to pray daily for GCB

MESSAGE TITLE: NEEDED TEAMMATES IN CHRIST'S CHURCH

1st: A Warrior in Your Prayer (v. 12-13)

Epaphras, v. 12 says, is '*one of you*,' another way to say he's on your team. Look at v. 12, it says he's always **struggling in prayer** – Greek root **agonize**.

This is a word from the ancient Olympics in Greece, especially gymnastics.

Think of the daily agonizing training, time investment, matter of discipline.

Same root word in 1 Cor 9:25: '*Every athlete exercises self-control in all things...²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.²⁷ But I discipline my body ...*' That's the language for the **spiritual discipline** of his prayer for the team, Olympic-level discipline, agonizing exercising.

He tells teammates in Rom 15:30 *I appeal to you, brothers...**strive together** with me in your prayers to God on my behalf* (same word, it's team effort).

This word described 'athletes as they gave themselves fully to their sports. If church members today put as much concern and enthusiasm into their praying as they did into their...games, we would have revival!' (Wiersbe)

VIDEO OF RUNNER PERSEVERING W/OUT A SHOE – apply to prayer.

ILLUSTRATION: WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS (AGONY OF DEFEAT).

HEB 12:1-2 (RACE, MARATHON AGONY). v. 4 *struggle* to shed blood.

Word used of Jesus in Gethsemane: Luke 22:44 '***in agony he prayed** more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground ...he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew... knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."*'²

Other verses say He made **loud cries** with **tears** (Heb 5:7). It was like blood sweat and tears, as He wrestled in prayer, but **ultimately He submitted** to His Father's will. That's the word used of Epaphras, laboring in prayer as a wrestler. He went to the mat for his team, ready when they might tap out.

I think of **Jacob wrestling with God** for blessing till his hip was dislocated.

Middle of v. 12 says his striving in prayer was '*that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.*' He knelt so they might stand and be both mature and assured. He prayed that they could stay in God's will. How do you pray for the single mom in the church, the widow, the young facing peer pressure in public school, a husband tempted to complacency? Pray like v. 12 that they would *stand mature*. For any tempted to doubt or disobedience, pray like v. 12 that they would be *fully assured in God's will*

Epaphras is an example to learn from. Look back at Col.1:7 *just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf* [so don't think of ministers as preachers only, think of prayer as a ministry for you, v. 9] *so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of **his will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...*

How will people stand mature? v. 28 *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone **mature** in Christ. For this I toil, **struggling**...* [same words as Col 4:12]. This is for everyone. Epaphras is a great lesson on intercession in prayer.

A warrior in your prayer is what every team needs, what we need to be.

2nd kind of teammate needed here: **A worker in your vocation**

Col 4: 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...*

Paul's team weren't professional pastors, they were **bi-vocational ministers**. Paul worked with **Priscilla and Aquila** as tentmakers by day and ministered in whatever other time they had day or night. Here as he lists hard workers, he mentions the beloved **Luke**, and his vocation was a physician or doctor.

Luke didn't have great theological learning like Paul, no education at feet of Gamaliel. He wasn't part of the 3-year discipleship program with Jesus that Peter and the original disciples had. But he used his vocation and training to serve the Lord. Ministry teams need prayer warriors and workers in their secular jobs. And ministry advances when those people use their gifts in practical support

Paul was gifted at preaching, Luke was gifted at practicing medicine. Paul needed a teammate to tend to the physical, whether for a thorn in the flesh, or when he was nearly stoned to death, or beaten nearly to death with rods, or flogged with whips. Paul seems to have bad eyesight and weaknesses he writes about, and others with him like Timothy had chronic stomach issues. Luke joined Paul's team in Acts 16 and through his missionary journeys. It seems he gave up his practice back home to be the first medical missionary. He gave up comforts and career – maybe lucrative – to see the Lord at work

120 years ago **my great-great grandpa** traded a medical practice to become a **missionary doctor in Congo** and got to see the Lord at work in mighty ways. I know doctors in our church who've used their gifts to serve here, abroad. Or physical and occupational therapists serve in Mexico or with JAF WFW, helping with wheelchairs and disability ministry to spread gospel. Others:

- Former member using gifts as a linguist (another missionary pilot)
- Young people using their teaching training overseas (Brian, Erin)
- Tim and Melody in Guam, his maintenance of PIU, her teaching
- Mary Lou Carruthers used her IT training there to help the school
- A science educator evolutionist turned evangelist in creation science

But you don't have to travel like those people or Luke, God calls most of us to use our vocation to serve the Lord where we are. How can you serve the Lord in your vocation, in your job? Are you using your gifts for His glory? How are you supporting the church? Praying? Pouring yourself into people?

Paul couldn't do what he did or write what he wrote without his teammates.

TRIVIA – **WHICH HUMAN AUTHOR WROTE MOST OF THE NT?**

Paul wrote the most BOOKS - **Luke** wrote the most WORDS (Luke, Acts, almost 38K, 27% of all words in Greek NT vs. Paul's 23% and 34K words).

The Bible isn't written *for*, or even mostly written *by* pastors. The writer of more of the NT than anyone else was just a guy faithful in his vocation and God used him as he did his job for the kingdom. He wasn't even Jewish, he was a Gentile God chose to write

more of the NT than any Jew did. Other gospels by tax collector Matthew, former backslider Mark, fisherman John).

The early church needed passionate type A guys like Peter, but also careful historians and physicians like Luke. We need your gifts on our team, too.

A warrior in prayer, a worker in vocation but

#3. a warning to your heart

The end of v. 14 has another name after the dear friend Luke: *and Demas...*

That name appears in the end of Paul's letter to Philemon, let me just read it '*Epaphras...sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers*' – same names in Col 4, Paul's fellow workers

TURN TO 2 TIMOTHY 4 – context is years later, Paul nears his end
 READ V. 9-11, COMMENT ON **DEMAS DESERTING TEAMMATES**
 THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAM – DEMAS IS A WARNING TO HEARTS

1 Jn 2:15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world...¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

GIVE GOSPEL FOR UNBELIEVERS

WARNING TO BELIEVER'S HEARTS NOT TO LOVE THE WORLD
 CAN'T SERVE 2 MASTERS, LOVE ONE BUT WILL DESPISE OTHER
ELLIOT QUOTE – "DON'T BE A FOOL - DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE"

IF YOU'VE HAD SOMEONE YOU THOUGHT WAS CLOSE, BUT HAS LEFT YOU,
 TAKE HEART FROM BOTH PAUL AND JESUS.

'Jesus had His Judas, and Paul had his Demas...note that even the two greatest leaders the world has ever known had those who failed them.'³

Look also to **Mark** in v. 10, who despite great sin became greatly useful to the team after he was reconciled. Where friends fail you, look higher than Luke to the Great Physician. Jesus wrestled in prayer in Gethsemane and He always interceded for you in heaven. Jesus never deserts or forsakes you.

Colossians ends not with a warning, but

#4. A Word of Exhortation.

¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. That's a sweet word to this sister Nympha who hosted a church in her home. Women were important to Paul and the early church that was often supported by them (Acts 12, 16, Romans 16 leading ladies). Inspired scripture exhorts us to greet and recognize faithful ladies by name.

Paul taught a **complementary view of women** and often complimented them

¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the **Laodiceans** ... do you recognize that church name from another passage?

The book of Revelation starts with the blessedness of reading aloud. Rev 3 is the Lord's final word of exhortation to this church as it later **became lukewarm**, neither hot nor cold.

He exhorts the **church of Laodicea**: '*repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*' (3:15-22)

The exhortation is for the importance of reading and heeding the scriptures. There's a special meeting of Jesus with believers who hear and welcome Him (this isn't non-Christians inviting into your hearts, this is for churches inviting intimate fellowship by open ears to receive, respond to His voice.

Be exhorted by the church of Laodicea, **don't let yourself become lukewarm**

Col 4: ¹⁷ **And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." We don't know who he was or what his ministry was but this is a word of exhortation to be faithful, fulfill what God calls you to.**

This is a word to leaders, but it applies to believers (moms, youth, elderly).

The Lord calls you to minister, to serve, fulfill the role you have, don't flake

No excuses. Paul writes this with a chain on his wrist. ¹⁸ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.*

Remember **those in chains for their faith today** – Arab lands, Asia, Africa.

Remember also churches that are chained in North America, in Canada. We need to remember to pray for **persecuted and suffering believers** and see the grace we have as a church and the grace we need to be with us every day.

One way for grace to be with us is in how we speak (I've been convicted).

Col 4:6 '*Let your speech always be gracious...*' v. 18b *Grace be with you.*

Note Sheet:

1. How does the concept of teamwork in sports help you understand how Paul spoke of his teammates in ministry? What's helpful in that analogy and how might you add to it for those you need in your life?
2. How can messages and passages like this help you think about less known names included in scripture? How might you encourage someone who's less upfront or less known in your church?
3. In v. 12 what stands out to you about Epaphras? What convicts you most and how can you grow in that?
4. As you read v. 13, who do you think of who works hard for others. How can you encourage him or her?
5. Thinking of Luke's example in v. 14, what are some ways you've seen non-pastors use their profession or vocation to serve the Lord? What's a gift or skill God has given you that you can use to serve Him?
6. How might the warning of Demas (2 Timothy 4:10, 1 John 2:15) play out in our day? What's the cure?
7. What stands out to you from the closing exhortations in v. 15-18? How can you exhort others in that?

¹ Ian S. McNaughton, *Opening Up Colossians and Philemon*, p. 89-92.

² Luke 22:40-44 ESV.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Colossians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 198.