

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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COLOSSIANS: Hope of Glory
Colossians 4:7-18
Community in Christ

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For those of you who have been around here for awhile, you know Christmas is a big deal for my family. Every year, the Green family convenes at my parents' house in Ohio. What started out as my mom and dad has turned into 50 plus people. And one of our annual traditions is to take a family picture. Years ago, Dad would set up a camera on a tripod and stand in front of the Christmas tree. Now, we have to stand on the front porch. It's quite an undertaking.

Everyone in that picture is connected to everyone else in that picture. We know each other's names and stories. Even more, we share a family name and are part of each other's stories. That's our family. Real people. Real stories. Real struggles. Real celebrations.

I have one of the most important jobs to do for the annual Christmas photo. My job is to police the picture. Here's what I mean. Through the years, kids start dating and bringing their boyfriends and girlfriends over for Christmas. And, since they are kids in love, they aren't thinking clearly. They just assume they'll always be together. I know better. Just because you are in love this Christmas doesn't mean you'll be around for the New Year.

And since my mom loves to display those family Christmas pictures, we can't have old boyfriends and girlfriends in them. That's a great way to start a fight with your future spouse.

So, it's my job to police the picture. Somebody has to do it. And, since I'm the only uncle who lives out of state, I don't mind being the bad guy. I break the news to the boyfriends and girlfriends that they aren't allowed in the picture until they are actually family. "Derrick, my name is Titus. I'm Hannah's uncle from Florida. You seem like a nice enough guy, but you'll need to sit this one out." "Justin, I know you are engaged but engaged isn't married. So, why don't you take the picture instead of trying to be in it."

That might seem harsh, but the whole reason we are taking the picture is to get a snapshot of who is in the family. It's a way for us to be reminded of the real people that we really are connected to in a very special way.

And the way Paul ends his letter to the Colossians is sort of like our family picture. It's a reminder that when you are in Christ, you are part of a great, big family. You are connected for the rest of your life to everyone else who is in Christ. You aren't in until you are in. But, once you're in, you're family.

So, look with me at this family portrait from our last text of study in Colossians.

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.

These are the kinds of passages that we often skip over. Most of the names aren't people we recognize. Their stories feel obscure and maybe irrelevant. But, as I've studied for this morning, I've been so encouraged. There's so much in these closing verses.

And what I want you to see is that when we live in relationship with Jesus, He places us in relationship with an entire community of people. We are connected to people who are connected to Christ. That's our big idea for today.

Big Idea: Living in Christ's power enables us to live in community with Christ's people.

The Christian life wasn't meant to be lived in isolation. It isn't a solo event. It's meant to be lived in community. We are supposed to know the names and stories of people who are our spiritual family. Jesus living in us causes us to be part of a new community of people.

So, let me walk you back through these verses and show you 4 things we learn about a community of people who are living in Christ's power.

1. The Community in Christ Steps into Truth with One Another

What I mean is that these verses are really a snapshot of how the gospel truths Paul taught were lived out in the community of believers. For instance, these verses reveal a picture of the diversity that is part of Christ's body.

Colossians 3:11

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

The body of Christ is marked by diversity. He breaks down social, economic, and racial barriers that often divide our culture at large. In Christ, we are family.

Verse 9 mentions Onesimus. The book of Philemon tells us that Onesimus was a runaway slave. Verse 14 mentions Luke and tells us that he was a physician. Verse 10-11 talk about Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus (also known as Justus). Paul says those men were Jews. Meaning the rest of these people are Greeks or Gentiles. Verse 15 refers to Nympha and the church in her house. She was a woman. The rest of the verse is men.

So, you have men and women. Jew and Greek. A slave at the lowest end of the social scale and a respected doctor. Paul wasn't speaking theoretically about the diversity that's part of Christ's body. He was living it out in community with real people.

Colossians 3:13

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Onesimus was a runaway slave. Verse 9 says, “*and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.*” Paul is saying that Onesimus was from Colossae. He was part of this church. And so was his master. The book of Philemon is written to...you guessed it, Philemon. He was part of this church. Onesimus was his bondservant. And Paul calls him to forgive Onesimus and receive him as his brother and release him of his debt.

You see the same thing with Mark. Mark abandoned Paul on his first missionary journey. He was the source of conflict between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15. But look what Paul says in verses 10-11.

Colossians 4:10-11

...Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 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.

Paul isn't living in a theoretical world, and the truths of the gospel aren't theoretical truths. They are supposed to be put into practice.

There are almost 60 “one another” commands in the New Testament that tell us how we are to relate to other believers. And the only way to put those commands into practice is by living in community with actual believers. That's how we get to step into the truth of the gospel and experience the power of Jesus to transform our relationships.

2. The Community in Christ Serves One Another

7 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,

Tychicus is mentioned several times in Paul's letters (Ephesians 6:21-22; 2 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12). Paul sent him to various churches to deliver messages to various churches and to give them updates on what God was doing through Paul's ministry. Along with Onesimus, he brought this letter to the church Colossae and also the letters of Ephesians to the church in Ephesus.

Paul says he was a fellow servant in the Lord. Paul was serving the church by teaching them essential truths about the gospel. Tychicus was serving Paul and the church by delivering his letters to churches and church leaders. Paul had a role of service. And so did Tychicus. Paul was a preacher and apostle. Tychicus was a First-Century Amazon delivery driver for the gospel. They each had different roles, but they were both fellow servants. They were both essential. Without Paul, half the New Testament wouldn't have been written. Without people like Tychicus, Paul's writings wouldn't have made it to the church.

And that's how the community in Christ is meant to function. As each of us serves in our particular roles, Jesus uses our collective service to advance the gospel. 1 Corinthians 12 says the church is the body of Christ and each of us is a unique part of the body, designed and gifted by God to serve the rest of the body.

And I love how we see this happening every week. Just think about the various ways people serve as part of this church every week.

Driving golf carts; stocking grocery items; holding doors; teaching classes; pushing wheelbarrows; rocking babies; mentoring students; singing and playing instruments; doing maintenance on our buildings; helping abused women find a safe home; cleaning gutters and repairing homes for widows; broadcasting our services online; taking meals to grieving families...I could go on and on. Each person has a different role but all of us are fellow servants. And Jesus is using our collective service to advance the gospel in this community and around the world.

That's how the community in Christ is designed. There's a place for each of us. And if you aren't already serving as part of your church, will you take the next step? If there's a particular area of ministry you are drawn to, reach out and get involved. If you want to serve but don't have the slightest clue what to do next, talk with one of our pastors after the service or throughout the week. We would love to help you connect with a role that fits the way God has shaped you. The community in Christ Serves one another.

3. The Community in Christ Shares with One Another.

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.

Notice how much sharing there is in these verses. In verses 12-13, Epaphras shares their struggles. He was a part of the church of Colossae. And, when he learned about their struggles, he shared in that struggle with them. He prayed for them. He carried their burdens emotionally and spiritually. In verse 15, Paul says that a woman named Nympha hosted her church family in her house. She opened her home and shared it with the people who were part of her spiritual community.

In verse 16, Paul says that the church of Colossae should share this letter with the church of the Laodiceans, a nearby city. He also says the Laodiceans should take a letter he had written to them and share it with the Colossians. They were supposed to share the truth of what they were learning about Jesus with each other.

The family of God is meant to be a community that shares life with each other. One of the words the New Testament uses to describe the church is "fellowship/koinonia." That word means to hold in common or to share. That's how Jesus has designed us to live. Sharing with other believers...our struggles, our burdens, our blessings. The truth we are learning in God's word.

And this is one of the primary roles for our small group ministry. On Sunday mornings, we have connection classes for all ages and stages of life. On Wednesday nights, we have men's and women's bible studies that run from the Fall through the Spring. Those small groups are designed so you can get to know the names and stories of other people who are part of your church family.

But most of the sharing of our lives happens beyond those small groups when you get to know one or two people and invite them to really share life with you. We call that Making Church Smaller. It's what happens when you don't just show up to a group, but you open up to another person by starting a friendship, by taking a moment after small group to pray with a specific person, by having a meal in

your home or meeting for lunch and getting to know one another, by developing deeper relationships that allow you to talk openly and honestly about how you are struggling or what God is teaching you in His word.

And I want to encourage you to take the next step in that journey with us as a church. If you aren't in a small group, join one. Be part of a Connection Class on Sunday. Join us on Wednesday nights in a few weeks. If you are part of a small group, how can you make church smaller by inviting someone to pray with you or have a meal with you?

The community in Christ shares life with one another.

4. The Community in Christ Strengthens One Another

Colossians 4:17

And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

We don't know much about Archippus. In the book of Philemon, Paul calls him a fellow soldier. That's probably just Paul's way of saying Archippus was fighting the good fight along with Paul. We don't know what his specific ministry was or what he was battling personally. But evidently Paul believed he might be in danger of giving up. So, he tells the Colossians to encourage him to keep on going...to cheer him on.

And that's a significant role that the community of believers is supposed to play for one another.

Hebrews 3:12–13

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:24–25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Church, there's something I need to tell you. I'm not sure you've heard it before, so listen closely. Life is hard. Life is hard and it isn't getting any easier. Every person around you this morning is walking through something. And it might be a word from you that makes all the difference. One of the most influential pastors of the 20th Century was a man named W. A. Criswell. He pastored First Baptist Church of Dallas for 50 years. He served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention and was a key figure in evangelical Christianity throughout the world. He had a big personality and a booming voice and a great love for Jesus. When he was a student in seminary, he woke up one morning and was so full of joy that he went out into the courtyard of his dorm, raised his hands and started singing a song to the top of his lungs.

Many years later, he was preaching at an event in Richmond, Virginia. After the service, a man named Paul approached him and asked if he remembered that morning from decades before. Paul had been a student in the same dorm as Criswell. He had been deeply discouraged and had decided to give up on ministry. That morning, he had packed up his suitcase and was getting ready to head out the door. That's when he heard the voice of Criswell singing. The song was "It pays to Serve Jesus."

The last verse goes like this...

How rich is the blessing the world cannot give,
I'm satisfied fully for Jesus to live;
Tho' friends may forsake me, and trials arise,
I'm trusting in Jesus, His love never dies.

As Paul heard the voice of Criswell, the Lord encouraged his heart. He put down his suitcase and got down on his knees and went to the Lord in prayer. He spent the rest of his life serving Jesus as a pastor.

Church, you have no idea the heaviness that is in the heart of the person sitting next to you. There are weary hearts in your section. There are lonely people in your row. There are people who entered the room this morning and their emotional tank is on empty.

And God has a word for them that He wants to pass along through you. He wants them to hear you say, "Don't give up. Keep on keeping on. Jesus is worth it. It pays to serve Jesus." The community in Christ is meant to strengthen each other by encouraging and exhorting one another in the midst of the battle.

How might the Holy Spirit be stirring you to encourage someone else this morning or this week? That's what family does. Living in Christ's power causes us to live in community with Christ's people.

Application Questions

1. Are you in Christ? You aren't in the family of God until you place your faith and trust in Jesus.
2. Are you committed to a Community? Three different churches referenced in this text: church of the Colossians, church of the Laodiceans, the church that met in the house of Nymph. Though every believer is part of the Church, each believer is called to live in the community of a local church.